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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[“HOW BEAUTIFUL!” EXCLAIMED BARBARA. “WHAT A LOVELY FACE!”]

A GREAT COST.

CHAPTER XIX.

Muriel woke the next morning with a sudden start. Her sleep had been one long procession of dreams about Humphrey, Barbara, Julian, and a host of others, all more or less confused and distressing, however.

She was awake all at once to the full reality of events as she sat up in bed and brushed her hair from her brows.

She was altogether unhappy, anxious about Humphrey, tormented and worried at the position into which, by a moment's weakness, she had allowed herself to drift.

Scanned now by the clear morning light Muriel could see no real excuse for all this mystery, and Josephine's clever, plausible soundings were almost incomprehensible.

Now she regretted her weakness, and how she deplored the fact of having acquiesced in the deception during the evening! Barbara's pale face, with its pale cheeks and eyes full of growing trouble, quite haunted her; and

the thought of Humphrey's vexation at this curious distortion of the truth oppressed her.

What should she do? Steal now quietly into Barbara's room, and confess her wrong? It must be very early! She looked at her watch, and nearly exclaimed with astonishment, How late she had slept! It was close on nine o'clock, and at that very moment her maid entered the room with some letters and a cup of tea and a telegram.

Muriel hurriedly tore open the latter, and her lips trembled as she read it.

“Humphrey feverish and ill this morning. Dawson would be glad if you or I could go to him. Nothing serious. Don't be alarmed. But I think you had better start immediately.”—JULIAN.

“I must start for the North at once, Coxon,” the girl said, hurriedly. “Go and see if I can speak to Lady Bridgeworth. She will find me in Miss Vereker's room. Then come back and pack my small trunk.”

Muriel was flinging on her dressing-gown as she spoke. At this moment she hesitated no longer. She would go to Barbara, and tell

her the truth—that Humphrey had not gone to Ireland, and was, as his little love had feared, too ill to write or move. The thought of relieving her mind was a distinct pleasure; but this changed to a feeling of dismay and acute disappointment as her maid spoke.

“Her ladyship and Miss Vereker are out, miss. They've this very moment rode away to the Park. Her ladyship told me I was to give you her love, and say breakfast was at half-past ten o'clock, and you was not to hurry, miss.”

Muriel stood silent, holding the telegram in her hand. This early morning ride must have been arranged after she had gone to bed last night.

She could not quite recollect all that had happened after dinner was over. She only knew her head had ached, and Josephine had insisted gently and firmly on her retiring, coming up after she was in bed to administer a few words of cheering consolation about Humphrey, together with a tiny glass of weak brandy and water, which she prescribed in case Muriel should not sleep.

Muriel had protested against this stimulant,

get the kindness or doubt it; she only realised it in a vague sort of way as being there, and yet not existing, just as figures and incidents come so vividly in our sleeping imagination, only to melt and wait away with morning light and morning reality.

CHAPTER XX.

There was no message or written word left for Barbara by Muriel—at least, the girl found none; and there was no one to tell her that the note Muriel had scribbled so hurriedly and tenderly had been promptly committed to the flames by Julian, who had conveyed it to his own pocket instead of handing it on to its proper owner when Lady Bridgeworth's groom arrived with it at his house.

How the rest of the day passed Barbara could not have told. She was mutely grateful to Lady Bridgeworth for refusing to take her out shopping, and sat by the fire in the big drawing-room with her eyes fixed on a book and her thoughts on her lover.

The dream had vanished suddenly, and, as at the death of some flame, all the fulness of her woman's heart had been into being.

She gasped; she hungered for even one word from him. She fought against all the curious, uneasy doubts that, somehow, would rise in her mind. She was sick with a sort of nervous suspense. She could not even remember to write her daily letter to Mrs. Griffiths. She could do nothing but sit there waiting she knew not what for, fearing she knew not what, shivering with cold, and with all this accumulated agitation.

The entrance of Josephine renewed her. Lady Bridgeworth was in the very highest spirits, laughing and full of chat.

"I met Lord Castleton in Bond street; he implied to be allowed to come to tea. Of course I could not say 'no,' and he will be here very soon. Dear me, what a thing it is to be young!" Josephine sighed, and then stroked Barbara's soft cheek. "He is a nice boy," she said, reflectively.

"He reminds me of—of Cyril so much," the girl said, in a dreamy voice.

Lady Bridgeworth's head dropped. The mention of Cyril Vereker was something she could never bear easily.

"I don't see the likeness," she said, in her old-time way, as she flung off her furs and took up a nap.

She was restless, impatient, uncomfortable. All had gone so well, so wonderfully well, so far; but all was not accomplished. What if she failed at the very last?

Julian was clever, unscrupulous, but she did not trust him; and paradoxical as it seems she loathed herself for having stooped to associate herself with him in this matter.

"He will have a hand of steel," she thought to herself, bitterly. "I shall have to pay dearly for all this. Can he be of the same flesh and blood? What a difference between two men born of the same parents!"

She let her eyes rest on a portrait of Humphrey for a moment, and she stirred uneasily even beneath the gaze of his pictured eyes.

"How he would despise me. How—" and then her gaze went to Barbara's loveliness, and her heart grew harder and again immediately.

"To see her his wife," she said, between her teeth, "it would kill me. Ah! Lord Castleton. Just at time!"

Several other people drifted in as the Earl took his cup of tea and sat down beside Barbara, beginning to talk eagerly.

There was a babble of small talk, and Josephine could not catch what he was saying; but she was intensely struck by the fact that Barbara's face was flushed, and that her whole countenance seemed full of interest.

"Is she, after all, an ordinary flirt?" Josephine said to herself, in her wonderment, for Barbara had seemed to her to suffer rather than encourage Lord Castleton's evident

attentions; then her lip curled, though there was a flash of jealousy in her heart.

"She will not make a bad exchange. I believe that young fool would marry her to-morrow if she would consent!"

And then Lady Bridgeworth had to sit and to her other guests, and "the young fool" could talk away to Barbara as much as he liked.

"I wish I could get you into the back room, I have something to tell you, and something to show you, Miss Vereker."

"That does not seem very difficult to manage," Barbara answered, with a faint smile.

There was certainly a great pleasure to her in this young man's companionship, apart from that strange resemblance to Cyril. There was something in his nature and manner that recalled Humphrey.

In a few moments Lord Castleton had manoeuvred awkwardly enough to get Barbara away from the fire, and they sat down in a far corner of an inner room, not without giving some cause of uplifting of eyebrows and equivocal smiles. Of this, however, neither of the young people were in the least aware.

Lord Castleton seemed to be full of excitement.

"Do you know, Miss Vereker," he said, "I have made a most wonderful discovery. You will never guess what it is!"

"I am so stupid at guessing," Barbara said, smiling and ruffling her beautiful hair a little.

She felt better already for this brief intercourse with Lord Castleton. He brought a sort of healthy, invigorating atmosphere with him that went a long way to disperse the vague forebodings that had been distilling her so much.

"You shan't do anything you don't like," the young man said, colouring as shyly as a girl as he spoke.

He took a little packet from his pocket and began to unfold it. Away in the distance, Josephine was watching him as well as she could, and her curiosity increased every moment.

"I want you to look at this miniature, Miss Vereker?"

Barbara took the small picture encircled with small brilliants into her hand.

"How beautiful!" she exclaimed. "What a lovely face!"

"Just what I think," declared Lord Castleton, quickly. "That was how my Aunt Margaret looked when she was your age, Miss Vereker. And, his voice growing more excited, "if you look at it hard, and then at this," handing her a small mirror from a table near, "you will see part of the discovery I have made."

"You mean," Barbara said with a blush, and slightly mystified, "you mean you think I am like this picture, Lord Castleton?"

"I mean you are the very image of it," Lord Castleton answered, promptly, his face beaming with delight. "And now can't you guess a little bit, Miss Vereker?"

"Not a little bit!" was Barbara's answer.

"Then I must explain. You know you have said several times that I was like your brother who is abroad, and you remember the other day you told me your mother had died when you were born, and your father was drowned at sea. Well," the Earl just stopped to draw breath, and then went on. "Something, I don't quite know what, seemed to tell me that I had heard something of you before. Your name is familiar. Yes, I know you said you did not believe you had a single relation in the world; but, all the same, I felt there must be some one belonging to you. And this afternoon, when I went to see my grandmother—she brought me up from a kid—I mean a child—you know," he explained, hurriedly, "the idea came into my head to ask her if she knew anything about you."

Barbara looked, as she felt, utterly astonished.

"You—you are very kind," she began; but the young man stopped her.

"I know," he said, briefly, "it sounds rather like madness; but grandmother is a wonderful old lady. She knows everything about everybody; and then you see, as I said just now, I had a sort of vague idea that there was a Vereker mixed up some time or other with our family. And so I just waited a few moments, and after I had inquired after the rheumatism and all that, you know, I asked her plump out if this wasn't the case; and what do you think she answered as quietly as possible?"

"Your Aunt Margaret, my beloved and only daughter, married a Vereker just thirty years ago next December. Bertie, my dear!"

"I declare, Miss Vereker, I was just struck dumb, for you must know I had always been told my Aunt Margaret died when she was very young, and this is the first time I had ever heard she had been married."

Lord Castleton came to a good stop now to take his breath, and Barbara sat looking at the miniature, and not saying a word. She did not know what to say. Everything was so sudden, and so strange and—despite Lord Castleton's eagerness and earnestness—so unreal, she felt almost inclined to smile at this fairy tale he was unfolding before her, but she appreciated him too much to hurt his feelings.

"Then, Miss Vereker," the young man continued, drawing his chair closer up to her, "I just asked Grannie, and made her tell me everything. How poor Aunt Margaret fell in love with a young naval officer, and my grandfather refused to let her become engaged to him. How one day, in the middle of winter, she ran away from her home and married Cyril Vereker—yes, Cyril!—this triumphantly, as Barbara looked up with startled eyes—"and how afterwards, not even when he was dying, would my grandfather have her name mentioned, and she never saw him or Grannie again. I—I fancy," Lord Castleton said, growing a little uncomfortable as he remembered he was in all probability dealing with Barbara's father, "Poor Aunt Margaret was not very happy. Grannie would have forgiven her and taken her back, but she did not dare go against my grandfather; and then you know the sort of thing. Aunt Margaret was proud, and would have nothing to do with her own people. She never wrote to her mother, and Grannie only heard of her in a roundabout way 'till just before you were born."

Lord Castleton was quite convinced now of his kinship with this girl.

"She wrote a letter to Grannie, and said she was dying, and had no one to leave her baby to but her boy Cyril, who was then about nine years old. Poor Grannie! I was so upset about her to-day, Barbara. I may call you Barbara since we are cousins."

"We cannot be sure!" the girl broke in hurriedly, her heart beating wildly. "If this should be true—if she had found her people at last—if the stigma of her birth was removed; but it was all too good to be true!"

"Oh! I am quite, quite sure, and so is Grannie. I told her you were just the very image of this picture, and she is longing to see you. Will you go to her to-morrow morning, Barbara?"

"But—" Barbara put her hand to her head in confusion and bewilderment. "But—"

"Oh! there is no real but, you know," the boy declared; "at least, there won't be when Grannie has gone into the whole matter. Say you are glad to be my cousin, Barbara?"

She looked at him silently for a moment, her brain full of thoughts—thoughts of the desolate, miserable childhood—thoughts of the past few happy months—thoughts of the present, of the future.

"If it is proved true I shall be glad. Yes," she said, slowly, and then she could not overcome the touch of bitterness. "Yet I have lived all these years without any people. All my life I have been alone, except for Cyril. No one has cared enough for us to seek us out."

We might have died of starvation, and no one would have cared!"

"Oh! don't talk like that, dear!" the young man exclaimed, in genuine distress. "It sounds so awful; and, besides, it is not true. Grannie says for years she has been trying to find some trace of Aunt Margaret's children, and has never been able to do so. I quite assure you on my honour you would have been sorry for the poor old lady—to-day she was so upset, and she is always so brisk and sharp. I never remember to have seen Grannie cry until to-day."

"I am sorry," Barbara said, and her own lips trembled.

She sat gazing down at the lovely face in the miniature. Her mother! Was it possible? Could it be true—her mother Lady Margaret Vereker. Her own name was Margaret.

Her colour came and went quickly—Lady Margaret's husband had been called Cyril.

It was strange—very, very strange—if it were true! But how were they to know this? How prove the truth? Who was there to help them clear up the mystery? She could tell nothing, she did not possess a paper or anything, and she did not know where to find Cyril—poor lost Cyril!

Her face grew paler and paler as each thought flashed through her mind. If only Humphrey were here to help her, or Muriel, or Owen Griffiths and his sweet, kind mother! In all the crises of her life it seemed to be her fate to be alone!

Lord Castleton watched her anxiously.

"You will come and see Grannie?" he said, breaking the long pause.

Barbara lifted her wonderful eyes from the old picture lying in her lap. It had grown upon her, almost unconsciously, that there was, indeed, a strong likeness between it and her own reflection.

"I will come if you wish," she answered.

His face fell. He had expected she would have been as full of excitement and eagerness as himself; and she spoke in such a dull, hesitating way, she seemed to read his disappointment.

"You are very, very kind to me!" she said, suddenly, and her eyes grew misty with tears.

It was, indeed, pleasant to have someone so eager to claim kinship with her; and she felt a thrill of delight for the moment as she remembered Humphrey, and how sweet it would be to realise that his wife was not a possible disgrace to his old, honourable name, but was herself of equally honourable birth.

"And I—I shall indeed be happy if I can call you my cousin; but, you know, Lord Castleton, my life has been different to yours. Yes, I know I am much younger, but I have faced sorrow, want, a hundred things you will never know! I have been taught so many bitter lessons. I—I think I am prepared now for any disappointment!" All the vague forebodings and presentiments returned now, and her heart beat in a hurried, troubled fashion, as the events of the last twenty-four hours flitted through her mind again. "Yes, I am prepared for any disappointment," she repeated, almost mechanically, and then she shivered.

Was she prepared for all? What if disappointment should come from that which was the sweetest and dearest thing to her! What if there were pain and sorrow at hand, and brought there by Humphrey! She recoiled from the very thought.

"I am wicked to think such things," she said passionately to herself. "How can I doubt him, my dear true love—the man who has taught me what love and truth are? No, no, no, if disappointment comes, it will not be through him!"

Lord Castleton was speaking cheerily.

"Oh! I am quite sure we shan't be disappointed! You'll see as soon as old Ferrars has got hold of the matter (that is Grannie's lawyer, you know, Barbara) we shall be proved cousins right enough, and then—"

"I shall be the proudest cousin in the

world!" Barbara said, half-laughing, half-crying. Her nerves were utterly unstrung. She was nervous almost to illness, and this sudden news increased her agitation.

"We must go back to the others," she said; "but promise me," earnestly, "not a word to anyone of—of this. I will keep the picture if you will let me do so, and to-morrow—"

"You will go and see Grannie. She is longing for you to go. That big house in—square! You may know it. I will be there to meet you, Cousin Barbara."

"Remember, it is a secret!" the girl said, with a wan smile, "until it is proved to be true—quite, quite true!"

Josephine received them with a smile.

"Well, young people! Some more tea, eh!" She scanned their faces thoroughly, and her curiosity grew deeper. She could not understand what was going on; then she looked at Barbara, and put her hand behind her back.

"Something for you, Baba. Guess what it is?"

Barbara's heart almost stood still, then beat to suffocation the relief was too great.

"A letter!" she said, suddenly. "A letter from Humphrey! Give it to me—give it to me!"

Josephine handed it without a word, only smiling to herself the while.

"Go into the next room and read it. Lord Castleton will excuse you. Lovers come before anything; don't they, Barbara?"

Barbara made no answer, but slipped the letter into her pocket. Josephine's voice and manner jarred on her—she could scarcely tell why.

"I am in no hurry," she said, meeting Lord Castleton's gaze. "It can wait a little while!"

All her pain and presentiment was gone. She felt she could face the whole world now with that sweet remembrance close to her hand.

(To be continued).

THE BELLE OF THE SEASON.

CHAPTER X'X.

It is my soul that calls upon my name;
How silver sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears.

—Shakespeare.

"It is getting late now," observed Rosenberg, when the interview had grown irksome to him. "You had better, perhaps, be on your way home. Remember, that it is to your interest to keep my secret, and that I will pay you well for doing so, but should you betray it you will receive a felon's doom!"

Somewhat annoyed at this cavalier dismissal, Lorraine rose, tied his necktie with trembling fingers, set his hat on the back of his head, and prepared to take his departure.

"One thing must be understood," he said, doggedly, as Rosenberg arose to see him 'depart, "an' that is I'm comin' to see you 's often 's I choose. Pity I can't see m' own son! An' when want money, it's everyday, I will have it! If you 'ny me, I'll 'fess every-thing, and take consequences!"

"You shall have everything you want!" declared Rosenberg, deeming it politic to ignore his previous remarks.

"An' when I choose to live in 'same house with you I shall do it!"

He shook hand with Rosenberg, and after a few further words [made his way into the corridor, and was ushered into the street.

"I wish something would happen to him on his way home!" muttered Rosenberg, flinging himself wearily upon a sofa, his countenance looking quite haggard. "I shall live in constant fear of his coming to live with me! I hope he'll get killed in some drunken

brawl. I shall not feel easy until I hear of his death."

His mind wandered in dark speculations, at which he would have shuddered even a few hours before—so rapid is one's progress downwards when once a descent from virtue is begun—and the object of the speculations was how best to entirely remove from his path his late dangerous visitor, and thus constitute himself sole master of the terrible secret of his identity.

The day after the lovers' interview on the rocks by the sea, Lady Geraldine wandered about the mansion of Rook Land in a state of happy restlessness, now looking out of the tower windows in the hope of catching a glimpse of Walter Lorraine, and again endeavouring to interest herself in books and needlework.

Notwithstanding the efforts of good Mrs. Tomlins to interest her, the day dragged slowly, and she frequently consulted her watch to ascertain how nearly it was spent, and as frequently looked upwards to learn whether would be favourable to the meeting appointed for that evening.

Immediately upon their arrival at Rook Land, the Earl had shut himself up in his study, admitting no one to his presence except his page, and replying to the solicitations of his niece that he was greatly fatigued by his journey, but that he would see her on the morrow.

In the flush of her happiness, therefore, Geraldine desired above all things to make her uncle happy. Her heart was filled with kind feelings towards every one, and she forgot the coldness that had always existed between her and the Earl, and resolved to bring about a happier state of feelings between them.

This resolve was heightened by a glimpse she caught of the Earl when she was passing through the corridor. The study-door was slightly ajar, and she saw his lordship sitting in an arm-chair, his body bent forward and sustained by his arms, his elbows resting on his knees. His dress was the same he had worn from town, and seemed not to have been touched since. His hair was dishevelled, and added to the wildness of his countenance, which was seamed with deep lines, and looked even more haggard than when she saw him last. His eyes wandered in restless, frightened glances, which instantly detected her presence, and he raised his hands to wave her away as if she had been an annoying spirit. The next moment the page had closed the door.

Lady Geraldine indulged in some speculations upon the Earl's singular conduct, but ascribed it to his fear of the disease which the family physician had assured her was preying upon him. Knowing how deeply he was attached to life, and how he had exulted in the possession of his honours, she did not wonder that death should be full of horrors to him, particularly so sudden a death as he had to fear from his malady.

But this decision was disturbed by the recollection that he affected to disbelieve the words of his physician, and declared that he was only nervous, and not suffering from heart-disease.

She lingered about the corridor until the page came out from the study on some errand, and then sent by him to the Earl an earnest request to be allowed to attend upon him, and cheer his hours of pain and loneliness.

The page delivered the message, and returned with the reply that the Earl had slept none the preceding night; that he was, consequently, much worse, and that he could see no one, not even his dear niece, as the sight of any face beside that of his favourite servant would only aggravate his nervousness.

Geraldine was, therefore, obliged to content herself with urging her relative, through the page, to send for Dr. Horton without an hour's delay, and she then proceeded to the drawing room, where Mrs. Tomlins was amusing herself with some Berlin work.

The drawing-room was a large and handsome apartment overlooking the sea, and with a window fronting upon the rocks that lined the shore, so that she would have found ample amusement in watching the white-capped waves pursue each other, and the gleaming sails in the distance, had not her mind been so preoccupied.

While she was looking out upon the shore, as a relief, perhaps, from the sea-view, she saw a horseman ride up towards the mansion of Rock Land, with every appearance of haste and excitement. He was a man of middle age, as nearly as she could judge from her brief glimpse of him, and of gentlemanly appearance, but, as he glanced upwards, Lady Geraldine thought that his face looked dark and sinister.

This personage gained an entrance to the mansion, and demanded admittance to the Earl, sending in his card by the page, who happened to be in the corridor at the moment of his arrival. To Geraldine's surprise he was admitted to the study, where he remained closeted with her uncle several hours.

It seemed very strange to her that, when her uncle had declared himself too ill to see her and receive her gentle ministrations, and that the sight of any face would add to his nervousness, he should admit a stranger to his presence, and keep him there so long.

This wonder and surprise were heightened when she and Mrs. Tomlina were joined at dinner by the Earl himself, dressed with extreme care, and with a countenance on which beamed pleasant smiles.

Nearly all traces of his late singular illness had vanished. It was true that he looked thin, and that deep lines had been lately engraved upon his face which could never be eradicated; but his late paleness was replaced by a deep flush, and his late nervousness by an unrestrained joyfulness. His eyes shone with their old lustre, and had lost their frightened expression, his step had nearly its usual vigour, and he carried himself erect, as he had not done since the fall.

Lady Geraldine could hardly comprehend that he was the same person she had seen crouching in his chair that very morning, as if he were awaiting in silent terror some awful blow.

"Why, uncle," she exclaimed, extending her hand, "this is a very unexpected pleasure! I can hardly believe that it is you—you looked so very ill this morning. Are you not over-exerting yourself?"

"Not at all, my child," responded the Earl. "I am well again!"

The countenance of Lady Geraldine expressed surprise at this announcement, as she said,—

"Is it the change of air that has cured you, uncle, or did your late visitor bring you good news?"

The Earl glanced at her half-suspiciously for a moment, and then replied,—

"He brought me good news, Geraldine—splendid news! Perhaps the sea air has done me good too," he added, as if fearing he had said too much. "At any rate, my illness has departed as suddenly as it came, and I am myself again!"

She did not venture to question him further, although she was but half-satisfied with his reply. She could not help asking herself what news could the stranger have brought that had power to restore the Earl to his usual health and spirits?

Never, since she had known him, had the Earl been so gay, so pleasant, so full of wit. His whole conduct seemed to be actuated by a feeling of relief—as if the horrible fears to which he had lately been a prey had suddenly vanished, and he once more felt safe!

After dinner he joined his niece in the drawing-room, when he begged her to indulge him in a little music, and he himself accompanied her in a song. He seemed so sociable that Geraldine began to fear that she would

be unable to keep her appointment with Walter.

After a time he ensconced himself in an arm-chair while Geraldine continued to sing to him, and it was not long before his late sleeplessness overcame him and he sank into a doze.

It was the first time he had closed his eyes in sleep since the fall.

As soon as she perceived his condition, she arose from the piano and glided from the apartment, hastening to her own chamber. Here she paused only long enough to don a light palmetto and a covering for her head, as a protection from the evening air, and she then quitted the mansion, hastening to the rocks where she had met Walter the previous evening.

It was a lovely moonlight evening, with the sea lying half in light, half in shadow to the eastward, and the shore seemed to be, as usual, deserted.

But it was not long before her eyes distinguished a tall, slender figure standing upon the rock to which she was hastening and as she looked at it she murmured her lover's name with an endearing epithet.

It was indeed Walter whom she beheld, and he advanced to meet her, exclaiming, as he folded her to his breast,—

"You are late, darling! I began to fear that you were ill!"

"I have been detained," she replied, "by my uncle. He has quite recovered, and I have been singing to him. He has just fallen asleep!"

"Recovered! Is it possible? Why, I understood last evening that you were seriously alarmed about him."

"So I was, and I think I had then reason for my alarm. He looked like one on the verge of death. But he is now quite well. He has received some good news, which has cured him!"

Walter led his betrothed to their seat upon the rock, saying,—

"Such a long day as this has been, dear Geraldine! I thought evening never would come. The sun seemed to be within view twice twelve hours! Has the day seemed long to you?"

He read an affirmative answer in her blushes.

He had debated in his own mind whether he should or should not tell Lady Geraldine of that singular adventure, and the misfortune which the poor gentleman he had relieved had endured; but he had finally decided in the negative, preferring not to cloud her bright spirit with woes she could not relieve.

But the adventure had aroused a deep interest in his mind, which had increased with thoughts on the subject. The strange, wild face of the fugitive seemed to haunt him in his happiest dreams; throughout the day, and that despairing shriek seemed to ring in his ears continually.

But all thought of the fugitive vanished now as he listened to the tones of his betrothed, and he was completely absorbed in his present and prospective happiness.

"You promised to wear my ring in token of our betrothal," he said, tenderly, "and so I walked over to the village this morning to buy one, so that I might place it upon your finger myself this evening. Here it is!"

He drew from his pocket a tiny box, which, being opened, was found to contain a heavy circle of gold of small inside circumference. It was unusually massive, and of the finest metal.

"I hope it will fit your finger, love!" he continued, exhibiting it to her. "You see that it has our united initials inside, as an emblem of our united lives."

Geraldine examined the ornament admiringly, and Walter then placed it upon its appropriate finger, which it fitted perfectly.

"I thought it would fit," he said, smiling. "I have a good eye, you see, for judging such things. I am sorry that I could not have

bought a ring more worthy your acceptance, but this was the best the village afforded!"

"I prefer it to all others," murmured Geraldine, kissing it. "You have placed it upon my finger, and it shall never be removed while I live!"

"I fear that the Earl will endeavour to break off our engagement!"

"But his endeavours will be in vain, Walter."

"And should he attempt to force you into a marriage with Lord Rosenbury I know you will remain true to me and our mutual vows."

"Yes, Walter," responded Geraldine. "Remember, I am promised to you. My uncle has threatened to force me into a marriage with Lord Rosenbury," she added, struck with a sudden thought, "and it is possible, should he learn of our betrothal, that he might endeavour to estrange us from each other. Should he, or anyone else, ever tell you that I am engaged to Rosenbury, or anyone beside yourself, place no faith in the assurance!"

"I shall not, love. I will never doubt your truth and fidelity to me, until you yourself send me back the betrothal-ring I have just placed upon your finger! As long as you retain that I shall know that you continue to love me. And should you ever wish to break off our engagement," he added, playfully, yet earnestly, "you have only to enclose me the ring without a word, and you will never see me again!"

"How can you suggest such a thing, dear Walter?" asked Geraldine, shivering. "Do you doubt me?"

"No, no, a thousand times no! But you see how unused I am to my great joy, my own darling!" replied Walter, clasping her fervently to his breast.

"Then be it as you say," she said, with smiles and tears. "When I get tired of you I'll send you back the ring. I fear, if you wait for any such event, however, you will have to wait longer!"

Walter's face was wreathed in answering smiles.

The faith he felt in his betrothed was, like his love, boundless; and the idea that either would ever be untrue to the other seemed to each absurd—as it really was.

"And when, darling, may I claim the fulfilment of your promise to become my wife?" asked Walter, as she leaned her head upon his shoulder.

"I want to try to win my uncle's consent first, dear Walter," responded Geraldine, blushing. "You know how dear he was to my father, and that he stands to me in the place of a parent, and I do not like to marry without his blessing, if I can gain it by waiting a little. But if he continues to refuse I—I will marry you when you please."

Walter expressed his joy at this assurance in rapturous terms.

At this juncture, a shadow fell upon the rocks beside them, and, looking up, the lovers found themselves confronted by the Earl of Montford!

There was a wrathful glare in his eyes as he surveyed the young couple, and a stern compression of his lips which boded them little good.

Directly after the departure of Lady Geraldine from the mansion, the Earl had been awakened from his doze by the entrance of Mrs. Tomlina into the drawing room; and on her stating that she had seen her ladyship going out upon the shore alone, he had started after her with the intention of escorting her home.

Hearing voices he was led to the very spot where the lovers were sitting, and his rage on seeing the young couple together can be better imagined than described.

"So!" he exclaimed, hoarsely, "this is your lover, Lady Geraldine? I little thought you had made so distinguished a choice as Mr. Lorraine, the son of Lord Rosenbury's former nurse and his gardener!"

Geraldine flashed with indignation, but Walter listened to the insult with unmoved

equality. He arose from his seat, clasped his arm about the waist of his betrothed, and replied calmly,—

"Your lordship cannot be more surprised at the condescension of Lady Geraldine Summers than am I—its object. But, humble as was my birth, my lord, I love your niece as much and far more, I believe, than any of her noble admirers can do, and my devotion to her has won an answering love. Not as the son of Lord Rosebury's gardener, but as a man and a gentleman, if integrity and refinement make a gentleman, I ask of you your consent to our marriage!"

"Well, this is presumption!" ejaculated the Earl. "Do you join in this very singular demand, Geraldine?"

"I do!" she replied, meeting his gaze with an unabashed countenance.

"Indeed! I should have thought that you, a belle as you are, having refused so many noble admirers, as this—this person is pleased to call them, would have penetration enough to see what a prize your fortune would be to this painter, and estimate his attentions at their real value!"

"You are mistaken, my lord, in your estimate of me," said the artist, quietly, although his cheeks burned. "Lady Geraldine is a fortune in herself, and I give you my word of honour—if it is necessary—that I have never bestowed a thought upon her money!"

"Of course not," sneered the Earl. "Down-born, poverty-stricken lovers never do when they aspire to the hand of an heiress! Geraldine," he added, addressing her, "I am astonished that you can have so completely forgotten your rank and position as to encourage this person, and must beg of you to give him his dismissal as a fortune-hunter unworthy of your notice!"

"I know him better than you do, uncle," said Geraldine, trembling with indignation. "He is all that is noble and good. If you do not believe me, ask Lady Rosebury, who has known him from childhood! She will tell you how honourable and worthy of honour he is!"

"Indeed!" commented the Earl, in a sneering tone.

"Yes, uncle," she returned, "with more spirit than she had yet shown, and I am his betrothed wife! I have promised to marry Mr. Loraine. You have taken towards me the place of my poor father, and I desire your consent to our marriage. We are willing to wait for it. But, sooner or later, I shall become the wife of Walter Loraine, with your consent, or without it, as you prefer!"

The Earl almost choked with rage at this open defiance of his authority. It was the first question upon which his will and that of his niece had clashed, and he had to struggle hard with himself to repress the violent words which now sprang to his lips.

"You cannot have my consent to such a marriage," he said, at last, as calmly as he could. "Why, think, Geraldine, what would the gay world, of which you are the idol, say to such a husband as you have chosen? An Earl's daughter marry a gardener's son. You would lose your place in society!"

"I should not care, uncle. Better is a happy home with a loving heart to shield me from all troubles and upon which to lean than all the fashionable acquaintances in existence!" said Geraldine, earnestly. "I like society, uncle, but it does not constitute my happiness. My best friends, I know, would appreciate Walter and honour him. Lady Rosebury loves him, and she is my dearest friend. Oh, grant us your consent."

"Never—never! This marriage shall never take place, I swear it!"

Geraldine clung to Walter, whose countenance beamed upon her with tender encouragement.

"Say no more now, love," he said, in a low tone. "I will call upon the Earl and ask his consent in a formal manner as soon as he has had time to give the subject a sober second

thought. Be brave, my love, my promised wife. He cannot separate us, you know. I desire with you to win his approval, since he is the only relative you have, and I do not despair of gaining it!"

"You are corrupting the mind of my niece against me, Mr. Loraine!" exclaimed the Earl, in an accession of rage, not having been able to distinguish the artist's words. "Come, you needn't deny it. I wish to have no further conversation with you. Geraldine, come with me. I shall not leave you here, and it is time we returned home!"

The first impulse of Lady Geraldine was to refuse to obey this command, fearing that Walter might regard her present obedience to the Earl as an omen of a future concession to his authority; but a glance into her lover's face showed her how great and implicit was the faith he placed in her, and she yielded assent.

"That is right, love," said Walter, tenderly. "We must leave no means untried to win the Earl's consent, and our married life will be all the happier for it. Shall we meet here to-morrow night?"

She assented, adding,—

"But if I should not be able to come, Walter, I will send you a note. My uncle cannot at least deprive us of the luxury of corresponding with each other."

"And should you need me, you will summon me?"

Lady Geraldine replied in the affirmative.

"Come, come!" said the Earl, impatiently. "If you have anything further to say to me, Mr. Loraine, say it at my house. If you or my niece have any self-respect, this will be the last stolen meeting you will have—and I am inclined to think it will be, any way."

"I will call upon you, my lord, to-morrow," said Walter, with calm dignity. "Perhaps I may be able to induce you to regard this matter in a different light."

He embraced Geraldine fervently, unheeding the angry frowns of the Earl, and as she turned to leave him, Lady Geraldine said,—

"Remember, Walter, I shall always be true. Whatever you hear, never doubt me."

The lovers exchanged glances that promised love and fidelity as well as words could have done, and the Earl then took the hand of his niece and led her homeward.

Neither spoke upon the journey, but once or twice Lady Geraldine glanced backwards and beheld the form of her lover, outlined against the sky, as he continued standing on the rock, and she knew that he was watching her progress homeward, perhaps with a view to observing whether her uncle treated her with his customary kindness.

When they had arrived within the corridor of the mansion, the Earl broke the silence by saying,—

"I have said that you will never marry Walter Loraine, and now I repeat it. I can prevent such a marriage easier than you think. There—you needn't take the trouble to reply. What I now wish to say to you is this: We start for London by the early morning train. My sudden recovery makes a longer stay here needless. Mrs. Tomline knows of my intention already, and your maid has put your things in readiness. Good-night."

He escorted her to the very door of her chamber, waiting till she had entered it.

Lady Geraldine was greatly surprised at this sudden announcement of the return to London, and it rendered her highly uneasy.

On entering her room she found it lighted, and her maid waiting to attend upon her. She learned from her that everything was indeed in readiness for a start in the morning, and then dismissed her.

As soon as she found herself alone she hastened to the window and looked out.

As she expected, Walter was still standing where she had left him.

"I wish he could know of our sudden departure," she thought. "He will wait for

me at the rock to-morrow evening in vain. I think I could go back to him and tell him what my uncle has said, so that he can return to town with us."

To think with Geraldine, was to act, and she opened the door, passing out into the corridor. The Earl's page was seated in the broad window-seat at the end of the corridor, and he arose, sitting before her, and disappearing in his lordship's study.

The next moment the Earl made his appearance, saying, with a smile,—

"Ah, Geraldine! so you were going back to see Walter and tell him of our new plans? I think it is too late for you to go out alone, and I hardly feel well enough to attend you. But he will discover your absence soon enough, and follow you to town. You see, my child," he added, significantly, "a new order of things is begun."

"Very well," she murmured, with a quiet firmness. "If one way is not open to me I will try another."

She advanced to her window, and flattered her handkerchief rapidly.

Walter observed the signal, and hastened to respond to it.

"Dear Walter," said Geraldine, when he was sufficiently near, "my uncle informs me that we are to return to town in the morning. Do not have any doubts of my love and constancy, nor any anxieties about me. I shall always be true to my promise! Heaven bless you! Good-night."

He responded fervently, and walked away to the shore.

CHAPTER XX.

The wretched have no country; that dear name comprises home, kind kindred, fostering friends, protecting laws, all that bind man to man—But none of these are mine. —Maturin.

AFTER hearing from the Lady Geraldine the intelligence of her proposed return to town with the Earl on the following morning, Walter Loraine slowly wandered back to their late trysting-place and seated himself upon the rock, giving himself up to thought. With a lover's tenderness he watched the light that shone from Geraldine's window; and once or twice he saw her shadow on the curtains as she passed between them and the light. Once he even had the happiness of even seeing her part the curtains and look out, evidently with a hope of catching a glimpse of him. She hastily withdrew, however, on seeing him wave his handkerchief, and soon after the light was extinguished within the chamber.

But Walter did not proceed immediately to his tent. He felt depressed and anxious in consequence of his late interview with the Earl, and could not resist the conviction that there were formidable obstacles between him and the attainment of his wishes.

The thought of a clandestine marriage was repugnant to his keen sense of honour. He could not bear the thought of stealing his bride, yet how could he wed her openly? It was too much to hope that the Earl would ever yield his consent to the desired union, or that any of Lady Geraldine's friends should regard the match otherwise than as very undesirable.

Gradually, however, Walter reasoned himself into the conviction that, all attempts at conciliating the Earl failing, he would be perfectly justifiable in defying his authority over his niece and inducing her to marry him openly. He reflected that she was nineteen years of age, past the period of childish impulses and thoughtless actions, that her judgment was good, and, consequently, no one could deny her right of choosing for herself. It would be the sheerest folly and wickedness, he thought, for her to sacrifice herself to an unloving marriage in order to pay off the Earl's debts or replenish his purse.

Having satisfied himself on this point, Walter mused upon the perfections of Lady Geraldine, and his heart thrilled anew at the

remembrance of her reception of his avowal of love for her.

In his joy at his present relations to Geraldine, he did not forget Lady Rosebury. The secret but that existed between her ladyship and himself made itself felt more than ever now. He longed to impart to her the secret of his betrothal, feeling that his happiness could not be quite complete until she had given him her blessing and approval. As Lady Geraldine was to return to town on the morrow, he resolved also to return, in order to be with her should she need assistance or encouragement, and also in order to impart to Lady Rosebury his new-found joy.

As he continued to muse, his gaze often wandered about the grim old mansion of Rock Land, dwelling oftentimes and longest upon the windows of Geraldine's rooms.

He noticed the lights on by one die out from the mansion, as if its inmates were all retiring, and soon not a gleam could be seen from its many windows.

If the mansion looked weird and grim in the sunshine, it looked truly so in the pale moonlight, with its hoary patches of light contrasting with gloomy shade, and with the ivy heavily draping the old square tower.

The picture presented by the mansion appealed to the young artist's sense of the beautiful, and he inwardly resolved to transfer a representation of it to canvas at some future period, to commemorate his betrothal. Occupied with this scheme he surveyed it still more critically.

Suddenly, he observed a light gleaming from one of the windows of the tower looking seaward, and he noticed that its gleams illuminated the sea in the immediate vicinity, and that it was of sufficient power to be seen at some distance by passing vessels.

Ascribing the sudden appearance of the light to the Earl's sleeplessness, Walter yet could not understand why it should be placed in its peculiar position nor be of such unusual brilliancy.

Dismissing his fruitless conjectures as foolish, he turned his gaze seaward. To his surprise, he beheld an answering light gleaming from a vessel which was steadily standing in for the little bay upon which the estate of Rock Land was situated.

Convinced, because it seemed so highly improbable, that there could be no connection between the two lights, yet wondering at the singular coincidence, Walter watched the approaching vessel, and by the aid of the moonlight was soon able to see her distinctly.

She was a graceful yacht, of perhaps twenty tons burden, certainly not more, and built with a view to obtaining the greatest speed, possible from one of her size. Her walls looked, in the peculiar light, like sheets of silver, and she came onward like a sea-gull skimming the waves.

As she continued to approach, Walter noticed two or three men on her decks, who were moving about attending to their sails, &c. The lantern continued to swing in her rigging, but her speed seemed to slacken. The observer, glancing at the tower, saw that the answering light still gleamed from its window, although its brilliancy had greatly abated. Even, while he looked, it disappeared altogether, and no sign of life or light could be seen about the tower.

Turning to observe the fleet of its disappearance upon the yacht, he saw that its light was also suddenly extinguished, and that its onward course was checked.

"I now lay motionless upon the water like a wounded bird."

Could it be possible that there was any connection between the two lights? he asked himself. Was the light in the tower a signal to which the light on the yacht was a response? But if so, why such a mystery?

For several miles up and down the coast there was nothing but rocks and chalk cliffs, not even a fishing village being within those limits. A vessel, might, therefore, run into Rock Land Cove in the full light of day with-

out risk of being seen by any person, with the exception of the servants at the mansion.

Why, then, should it make its appearance at night, with all the mysterious adjuncts, signals, &c.

Moreover, it could excite no attention if the cove were filled with a mimic fleet and every fisherman on the coast knew it. The Earl Montford had a right to gratify any such taste, and no one would care to gainsay it.

Thus reasoning, Walter arrived at the conclusion that the two lights were simply an accidental coincidence, and that they could bear no relation to each other.

Why they had been extinguished at the same instant, and why the yacht had anchored at that moment, he found it impossible to explain.

Although deeming it so improbable that the Earl should have any connection with the strange vessel, Walter indulged in various speculations as to its character, vainly endeavouring to explain the mystery of its late movements.

He was convinced that it could not be a gentleman's yacht, or at least, that no gentleman was then on board of her, the individuals he had seen having all sailor's jackets, and having the look, so far as he could judge, of thorough seamen.

Had the event occurred a score of years ago he might have believed it to be a smuggler, but the present low state of duties on foreign goods forbade that supposition.

Giving up his speculations as useless, Walter observed that the men had retired from the deck, and that the yacht now appeared lifeless and deserted.

After watching it a little while longer, and almost fancying its departure, it was so quiet and phantom-like, he arose and began retracing his steps toward his tent, which was nearly half a mile distant.

Half this distance had been traversed when he suddenly heard the sound of voices, and he paused instinctively, with the thought that their owners might have some connection with the mysterious yacht.

The voices sounded directly before him, but the intervening rocks shut out from his view the speakers.

Not wishing to overhear anything that might not be intended for his ears, he was about to announce his approach by a cough, when a low voice faltered in agonised supplication reached his hearing.

It was the voice of the singular fugitive he had believed during the previous night.

He knew it instantly, yet, to "make assurance doubly sure," he advanced cautiously through a passage that divided the rocks, finding in full view and quite near him a strange group.

Within three feet of him lay, heavily bound, the form of the fugitive!

At this distance of a few additional feet were a couple of men, whose countenances inspired a deep sentiment of distrust in Walter's breast.

They were both well dressed, had dark faces, with dark eyes gleaming from cavernous sockets, had both powerful, athletic forms and full muscular development, and from their strong resemblance to each other seemed to be brothers.

Their captive was attired in Walter's garments, which showed indications of a severe struggle. His face was ghastly in its paleness, with the exception of one or two long livid scratches, which had not been there the previous evening at the time of Walter's interview with him.

Walter's blood almost boiled with indignation at these evidences of the brutality of the poor gentleman's captors, and it was with difficulty that he could refrain from springing forward and avowing himself his champion.

Fortunately, he did not yield to the impulse, for the two men carried in their belts a profusion of weapons, while he was of course totally unarmed.

"Come, shut up your whining!" said one

of the men, as the captive paused in his supplications. "Tell us where you got those clothes—that's what we want to know!"

"That you never shall know," replied the captive, quite firmly.

"Well, we can find means to make you tell!"

The second man now interrupted the other by remarking,—

"Who cares where he got 'em? He probably stole 'em, knowing his others were not fit to be seen. You've been trying all day to find out where he got 'em; but the truth is, he's ashamed to tell—if he knows enough to be ashamed! Hadn't we better be off?"

"You are sure there is no one on the shore?"

The artist sprang into the shadow of the rocks as the principal speaker made a survey of the scene, and responded,—

"Yes, quite sure. Let's light the signal."

They moved off to a little distance, one of them, drawing a lantern and box of matches from his pocket, proceeding to strike a light.

Walter then leaned forward, and whispered,—

"Hush! Do not speak! It is I—Walter Lorraine—your friend of last night!"

The captive interrupted him by a low ejaculation.

"What are you about there?" said one of the men, half suspiciously. "Just you keep still!"

As he turned away his face again, both the captive and Walter breathed more freely.

"Tell me how I can free you," whispered Walter, earnestly. "Can I cut your bonds?"

The prisoner shook his head mournfully, and held up his hands, so that Walter could see that they were held together by iron fetters.

"But can't you walk?"

He had scarcely asked the question before he perceived that the ankles were heavily ironed, and the chain connecting his fetters was so short that it would be impossible for him to take a step even with assistance.

"Where are they going to take you?" asked the artist, as calmly as he could.

Another mournful shake of the head answered him, and the captive said, in a shrill whisper,—

"Alas! I know not! Whether to my old prison or to some new one I cannot tell! All I know is that I am doomed!"

At that moment the light flamed out of the lantern, and one of the men held it in his hand in such a way that no person on the shore would be apt to see it, while it was distinctly visible from the yacht. Twice he concealed the lantern altogether beneath the ample skirts of his frock-coat, evidently as a preconcerted signal, and he then extinguished the light and seated himself upon a rock with an expectant air.

His brother followed his example.

They had waited but a few minutes when a boat was cautiously lowered from the yacht; two men seated themselves in it, seized the oars, and struck out for the shore.

All this Walter observed, and the mystery of the yacht began to appear plain to him.

It had come into the cove for the purpose of carrying off the fugitive who had so strangely interested him.

He instantly realised that whatever he would do for him he must do quickly.

He had been convinced of the fugitive's sanity, and that he was the victim of some cruel enemy, and these ideas were confirmed by the mysterious actions of his captors and the waiting vessel.

Had he been really insane there would have been no need of all these precautions and all this secrecy.

But what could he do?

The fugitive was too heavily fettered to render himself any assistance, Walter was unarmed, and the two keepers were provided with weapons ready for use, and besides, they would soon receive reinforcement.

It was clearly impossible to attempt an im-

mediate rescue by force. All that could be done would be to obtain a clue to the captive's identity and place of imprisonment and follow it up.

"Tell me your name," he whispered, "and the name of your enemy! Quick!"

The captive opened his mouth to reply, hesitated, feeling rather than seeing the gaze of one of his keepers fixed upon him, but even then would have spoken, but the man came forward and stood beside him, evidently with the intention of assisting him to his feet.

The next moment the two men who had come ashore from the yacht landed at some low rocks that ran out into the water, and speedily made their way to the spot where the keepers and their captive were concealed.

These new comers seemed, as nearly as Walter could judge, to be Norwegian seamen. At any rate, they were foreigners, and their language, when they greeted the two brothers, was totally unknown to him.

After an interchange of remarks, the four men then came to the spot where their prisoner was lying, lifted him in their arms, and bore him to the boat, he making a few instinctive but of course unavailing struggles.

Every chivalric impulse of the generous youth was stirred as he beheld their movements, and it was with difficulty he could restrain himself from even then engaging in a useless struggle to release him.

But the reflection that he should only lose his life, and that that life was now precious to Geraldine, restrained him within the bounds of prudence.

He watched the men row out to the yacht, pass up their helpless burden to the deck, mount and draw up their boat, watched the process of lifting the anchor, saw the sails fill, and the yacht then moved slowly away from the shore.

"This is not the end!" he then declared, in a low, resolute tone. "I will yet rescue that man! I am convinced that in some way my life is linked with his! I believe that I shall yet be the instrument to restore him to his rights and baffl his cruel enemy!"

He continued to watch the little vessel, noting her every movement, and soon saw the lantern swinging again in her rigging.

Instinctively he turned towards the tower, and thought—he was not quite sure—he beheld an answering light flash across its windows. If he did, it did not reappear.

The lantern continued to gleam upon the yacht for the space of several minutes, then it was extinguished. Walter watched the vessel until it was almost beyond the range of his vision, and noticed that it had headed for the north. In the course of half-an-hour it had completely disappeared.

CHAPTER XXI.

His hand did quake
And trembled like a leaf of aspen green.
And troubled blood through his pale face was
seen,
As it a running messenger had been.

—Spencer.

On the morning subsequent to the events related in the preceding chapter, the Earl of Montford made his appearance at the breakfast-table, much to the surprise of Lady Geraldine, who had expected that his malady would return with renewed force, after his exertions and emotions of the previous evening.

But the Earl had seldom looked brighter or healthier. With the exception of a faint expression of anxiety whenever he regarded his niece, his brow was unruffled and his manner full of peace.

"We set out immediately for London, my dear," he said, as they arose from the table. "We shall have just time to catch the train. You will therefore oblige me by not delaying to explain our departure to Mr Lorraine!"

"He knows it already, uncle," responded the maiden, quietly. "I told him last evening that we were going."

"You told him! Impossible!"

"Not so. You forget that my room has windows! From one of them I conversed with him!"

The Earl's countenance darkened, and he bit his lips to restrain the angry words that arose to them while Geraldine quietly glided from the apartment to prepare herself for her journey.

In a short time thereafter, the family was on its way to the railway station.

She looked from the carriage-window as they entered the quiet country road, and had the satisfaction of beholding her lover watching her departure. They exchanged bows and smiles, and the smile lingered on Geraldine's lips long after she had passed beyond the sight of the young artist.

The Earl had noticed these adieus with a frowning brow, realising, for the first time, how strong was the will he was determined to bend to his, and how fervent was the love existing between Geraldine and Walter.

But even this realisation did not give him a thought of changing his purpose. His reasons for bringing about a marriage between his niece and Lord Rosbury were too many and weighty to be changed simply by a consideration of her happiness or that of Walter.

So making up his mind for a conflict of wills, and not doubting his eventual triumph, the Earl permitted himself to form plans for his own future when Rosbury should have paid into his hands the sum stipulated as the price for Geraldine.

The journey to town was performed in almost entire silence, the girl being occupied by her happy thoughts, Mrs. Tomlinson having sunk into a reverie, and the Earl being absorbed in his plans.

Immediately on their arrival at their town-house the Earl retired to his library, and soon after despatched by his page a note to Rosbury, stating that he had returned to town, and would be happy to see him at his earliest convenience.

The note was answered by Rosbury in person.

He was ushered into the library, which was flooded with a cheerful, mellow light, in strong contrast with the dimness and gloom that had reigned there on his previous visit, and the Earl arose to receive him with a manner directly opposite to his demeanour on that occasion.

"Good morning, my dear Rosbury," he said, heartily extending his hand. "We are back again, you see."

"And wonderfully improved by your trip to the sea-coast," remarked Rosbury, when he had returned his host's greeting. "Has your lordship quite recovered from your late malady?"

"Quite," was the reply.

His cheerful countenance, his unshrinking gaze, his hearty manner, all attested the truth of his declaration, and his visitor could hardly believe that he was the same fearful, nervous, timid being who had crouched in the depths of his arm-chair lately as if for refuge from an enemy.

Accepting a proffered chair, Rosbury drew near the Earl and awaited the communication he had been summoned to hear.

"I suppose you wish to speak to me about Lady Geraldine?" he said. "I can only hope that the sea air may have changed her heart as completely as it has your personal appearance, my lord. Have you been able to effect any change in her opinions?"

"None at all, Rosbury. On the contrary, circumstances have unfortunately confirmed them. The fact is, Geraldine found a lover in that desolate place."

"A lover?" repeated Rosbury, involuntarily.

"Yes. You will be astonished to discover that you have a rival in the son of your old nurse—Walter Lorraine."

"Walter Lorraine! Is it possible? Why, he went—Oh, I see it all now," declared Rosbury, in a tone trembling with his deep chagrin. "He went to Rock Land."

"Yes, he was there when we arrived. Geraldine met him among the rocks the very first evening, and there he offered himself to her acceptance. Just think of the fellow's assurance!"

Rosbury was unable to make any reply.

"Last evening Geraldine went out to meet him again, and I followed her, arriving at their trysting place in time to see him place a betrothal-ring upon her finger, and hear them talk a good deal of nonsense about it, and then I revealed myself. Lorraine had the presumption to ask my consent to his marriage with my niece, but of course I refused him, and then I conducted Geraldine home."

"Then he has given up all hopes of gaining her?"

"Oh, no, not the least. He does not recognise my right to control the hand of my niece, and he cares for no consent but his own. In fact, he is quite determined to step into possession of her fortune and enter upon a life of ease forthwith, and the infatuated girl is ready to do exactly as he says."

"But you are her guardian," suggested Rosbury. "You surely can prevent her throwing herself away upon a fortune-hunter in this manner, can you not?"

"I do not think the law would sustain me in any course I might take to prevent such a step," replied the Earl, "especially should Geraldine declare that I was endeavouring to force her into a marriage against her wishes. Any steps that I can take must be secret and cautious. To be frank with you, Rosbury, cunning and shrewdness are the great qualities needed at this juncture. It is as important to me as to you that Geraldine should become Lady Rosbury!"

"But what can we do? They will see each other every day, and at the first sign of hostility towards her plans, Geraldine will fly to Walter and be married to him!"

"True, Rosbury, but there must be no sign of hostility. We must contrive to estrange them from each other, and the rest will be easy. Suppose that Lorraine could be convinced that Geraldine accepted him in a moment of impulse, and that on her return to town and its gaieties she had repeated her engagement to him as foolish, and had decided that even for him she could not forfeit the charms of society and the good opinions of her fashionable friends?"

"Very good, my lord, but I don't see how such a conviction in Walter's mind could help us! The very next post would in all probability carry him a *billet-doux* completely counteracting it!"

The Earl smiled, as he replied,—

"My dear Rosbury, you don't quite get my idea. It would be a part of my plan to prevent these *billets-doux*. While Lorraine should be convinced of Geraldine's fickleness, Geraldine should receive the same impression in regard to her lover. The latter could be the more difficult matter, but I think it could be achieved. Then, if I know anything of woman's nature, Geraldine would be likely, in her chagrin and disappointment, to accept and marry you in order to show Walter that she was not pining for him!"

"Excellent! Capital!" ejaculated Rosbury, with a look of relief and pleasure. "You have the right idea, my lord. Let us hasten to act upon it. Which is the best way to proceed? Shall I endeavour to weaken the faith of Lady Geraldine first?"

"No. How could you hope to succeed in such a task? As far as I can see Lorraine's actions must be the genuine result of his weakened faith in Geraldine. Otherwise, she wouldn't believe anything against him. I believe I just told you that he gave her a betrothal ring. When placing it on her finger he declared that he could scarcely realise his own good fortune in having won her love; and should she ever decide to break their engagement she need only return the ring without a word, and she should never see him again!"

"And you think our battle will be won, my

lord, if we send back the ring?" inquired Rosenbury, with a glowing countenance. "What an admirable plan—"

"You are wrong, Rosenbury," interrupted the Earl, smiling at his companion's delight. "On losing the ring, Geraldine's first movement would be to write to Lorraine, explaining her loss. I do not wish to send back the ring, but a duplicate of it!"

Rosenbury expressed his admiration of this ingenious scheme, declaring that he should never have thought of it, and that it certainly could not fail of success.

"But how can you get possession of the ring in order to obtain a duplicate of it?" he asked, in conclusion.

"I hardly know yet. If I were to obtain it at night, when she was asleep, I should not dare to retain it until morning, and I should have no time to exhibit it to a jeweller. The subject demands thought. Leave it to me, Rosenbury. I shall be able to manage it!"

Convinced that the author of such a plan could be at no loss for means to put it into execution, Rosenbury became quite assured of his prospective happiness, and began indulging in dreams of a future with Geraldine.

"The sooner these misunderstandings are produced, my lord, the better!" he said. "If possible, I want to marry Geraldine before the season is over!"

"You shall marry her within a month!" declared the Earl, emphatically. "Make the preparations for your bridal, as I said, for before the month is ended Geraldine shall be yours!"

Rosenbury flashed with joyful anticipation on hearing this promise. He had had vague fears and anxieties in regard to his relations with Lorraine, as well as the opposition of Lady Rosenbury to the proposed match, but, under the promise of so speedy a marriage, those fears all vanished.

"Geraldine has a strong love for Lady Rosenbury," resumed the Earl, after a pause; "such a love as she would have given her own mother, had the late Countess lived. She thinks her ladyship can hardly do wrong, and a word from her has great influence with her. If your mother would now and then praise you to her, or hint that she would be delighted to claim her as a daughter, and use her influence in your behalf, particularly when we shall have convinced Geraldine that all is at an end between her and Walter, it would be greatly to your advantage. You had better speak to her ladyship about it."

"It would do no good," responded Rosenbury, bitterly. "I am not so great a favourite with her ladyship as you might imagine. Instead of using her influence in my behalf, she would prefer to exercise it in favour of my rival, Walter Lorraine!"

The Earl regarded his visitor in astonishment.

"You certainly cannot mean," he said, "that Lady Rosenbury would prefer the son of her gardener before Lord Rosenbury?"

The words and manner of his host recalled Rosenbury to himself, and with an assumed lightness of manner he explained,—

"The truth is, her ladyship has some old-fashioned scruples about love being a necessary preliminary to marriage, and she would rather have Lady Geraldine marry Walter Lorraine with love than marry me without it. Nevertheless, she is very anxious to ensure my happiness, and once assured that the marriage was really to be she would use all her efforts in my behalf."

Montford was quite satisfied with this explanation, although he could not help wondering at her ladyship's want of pride in thinking so highly of the young artist.

Pride was the essence of his character—not a lofty, exalting pride in the unstained name, and the exercise of all good qualities, but a pride that would not allow him to recognize any one as his friend, whatever the person's merit, who had not a long ancestral pedigree and rent-rolls of ample proportions.

"Well," he said, "her ladyship shall soon

be assured of the fact from Geraldine's own lips. Leave the matter to me, as I said before. It couldn't be in better hands?"

Rosenbury again expressed his thanks, and added,—

"Permit me, my lord, to ask why you have never looked upon marriage as a solution to your pecuniary difficulties? You are still comparatively young, and with your name and estates might wed a noble heiress. When I shall have removed Geraldine from your protection, your home will be very lonely."

The Earl's countenance became very pale as he listened to this well-meant advice, and he shaded his face with his hand to conceal the sudden emotion it caused him, and his voice was slightly uneven, as he replied,—

"Thank you, Rosenbury, for your suggestion, but I do not care to change my bachelor habits at my time of life."

"But, my lord, consider your coming loneliness—"

"Oh, I have considered it, my dear Rosenbury. But I am not young like you, and it does not alarm me. When you shall have reached my age you will prefer your table, your wines, your horses, &c., as I do. Enjoy yourself in your own way, as I do, but don't, I beg of you, try to make a Benedict of me!"

He concluded with a smile, removing his hand from his now unruffled countenance.

"Well, since you are so determined to remain a bachelor, argument will be useless," responded Rosenbury. "But come out with me for a drive in the park, my lord. My carriage is in waiting, and you have at least the taste to admire the ladies you will see, even if you have no matrimonial designs upon them."

After consulting his watch, and observing that it was near the fashionable hour for driving in the park, the Earl accepted Rosenbury's invitation, and they were soon on their way.

(To be continued.)

A BEAUTIFUL CLAIMANT.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE girl who had wrought such dire havoc in Squire Thornton's home, and who had contrived so skillfully to ingratiate herself into the eccentric old gentleman's favour, sat in a private room of a very fashionable boarding-house in Paris.

She was dressed in a tea-gown of ruby plush, trimmed with costly lace. Her hair was arranged in a coronet of pearls by the skilful fingers of a French maid.

Everything about her spoke of wealth, and yet the expression on her face was not that of a happy woman.

She had elected some months before to commit an awful fraud—a nameless sin; and though her schemes had succeeded beyond her wildest expectations, content was a stranger to her.

Three or four years before a brother and sister had gone out to Africa to seek their fortune. The girl, reckless, beautiful, and uneducated, became one of the dancers at a circus, and won the heart of weak, susceptible Jack Bovington; and then the man, whose strongest passions were avarice and a wild, fierce love for his sister, easily drew from Jack the story of his English relations and his grand expectations.

He at once conceived the idea of going to England, and interesting the lady of the Manor in her distant kindred. Borrowing a hundred pounds of his brother-in-law, Andrew Duncan sailed for Southampton, resolved, by hook or by crook, to worm himself into Rebecca Bovington's favour, and induce her to receive Mr. and Mrs. John as her nearest heirs, and provide for them favourably.

At first fortune favoured Mr. Duncan. He obtained the post of agent or bailiff to Miss

Bovington, enjoyed a handsome salary, and a fair amount of his employer's confidence; but shrewd and keen-witted by nature, Mr. Duncan soon perceived that the old maid was intensely proud.

Any attempt to mention her family she quietly passed over in silence. Either the wound of the parting from her cousin-lover over sixty years before still rankled, or else she had the superstitious feeling very general among old people that to appoint her successor would hasten her death.

Businesslike and methodical in all other matters, nothing would induce her to make the slightest provision for the future ownership of the home she loved so well.

Foiled on this point Andrew Duncan took another line. Failing her relations, she might will her property to friends. She had none nearer or dearer than the Thorntons.

If he could marry Kitty it seemed to Andrew he stood a good chance of a handsome legacy.

Unfortunately for this project, the Squire always persisted in treating Mr. Duncan as an inferior; and his daughter, though far less haughty in her manner, seemed to think it impossible that the agent should aspire to be more than a stray acquaintance.

So time went on; the letters from Africa grew more and more dismal. Jack had lost everything but two or three hundred, and gone up to Basfontein to seek his fortune at the goldfields.

"He won't find it," wrote Julia to her brother; "and I sometimes think the old lady at the Manor will outlive us both. You had better not enlighten her as to her African relations just yet, for if anything happens to my husband I have no wish to enrich his sister."

This letter, so to say, "forced" Mr. Duncan's hand. Above all things, he must ascertain whether Jack Bovington was Miss Rebecca's next-of-kin.

With a skeleton key he opened some drawers in the library, and was busily engaged in examining her private papers when she herself surprised him.

She told the Squire she had not seen who was the midnight thief; but she was tolerably certain in her own mind, and she would have sent Duncan about his business in a very short time if she had lived.

The agent took care to give her something else to think of. Knowing the superstition in her family that the apparition of a riderless white horse boded illness or death to the Bovingtons, he took care that one should meet her eyes. He worked the trick so cleverly that no one even suspected the quadrangle of having been hired for the purpose.

Poor Rebecca Bovington and her old butler believed implicitly that the white horse was a "warning." The lady hastened to set her house in order, and before another night she was dead.

That the Squire as trustee would speedily dismiss him, Andrew knew! He therefore took the onus of leaving on his shoulders, and resigned his post.

The day after Miss Bovington's funeral he was in London, summoned there by a hurried telegram.

"Just arrived. Meet me in the first-class waiting room at Charing Cross any afternoon this week at four." "JULIA."

Julia had paid two visits to the railway station before she was rewarded by a sight of her brother.

The meeting was characteristic of the two. She nodded carelessly, as though they had parted only the day before, and said, quickly,—

"I am staying in the Kensington-road. Can you spare time to come and have a long talk?"

He answered by drawing her hand through his arm and leading her out of the station. Calling a cab, he signed to her to give the driver her address, and they were off.

No meeting could have been apparently

more innocent, and, yet, the brother and sister were both what is called "dangerous." Julia had ruined her husband and blighted his sister's life, and even now was forming a plot as cruel and heartless as was ever conceived; while her brother had darker deeds still upon his conscience.

They were, in fact, a pair who would stick at nothing to gain their own ends, and the ends in this case meant the wealth and lands of the Bovingtons.

"Where is your husband?" asked Andrew, when the two were seated cosily at tea in Julia's drawing-room.

And he it remarked the widow had not established herself at Kensington on account of her shyness, but simply because she had been born and bred on "the Surrey side," and thought it would suit her amazingly to be within a penny-steam-ride of the Borough.

"Dead!" and for an instant her voice softened. "Don't speak to me of Jack, Andrew, or I shall make an idiot of myself. He belongs to the past, and I'm going to bury it!"

"What in the world ruined him?" demanded Andrew. "I'm sure he had a fair start."

"Drink ruined him!" replied Julia, fiercely. "And they say—his sister and her friends—that I drove him to the brandy bottle. I'd like to be revenged on Marguerite, if it were only for that. I always hated her, 'Drew, from the very first. You remember?"

"Ay, I remember! It wasn't likely you'd break off together, Ju. It would be like the hawk and the dove mating."

"Well," said Mrs. John Bovington, bitterly, "if I can manage it, she'll be poor all her days, while I ride in my carriage. Now, Andrew, you'd better speak first. I know the old lady's dead; I saw it in the paper. Who comes in for her money?"

"The descendants of her first cousin, Arthur Bovington, who, with his only son Walter, left Malbourne in the Amazon a good number of years ago."

Julia tossed her head. "And that means my delightful sister-in-law, now that Jack and our baby are gone! Well, if my plan succeeds, Marguerite won't enjoy much of the Bovington money."

She was prevented explaining what her plan was by the entrance of the landlady to clear away.

"Why does that woman call you Miss Bovington?" demanded Andrew, when the cloth was removed. "And why in the world have you taken off your wedding-ring?"

"For one and the same purpose, sir! I am not your sister Julia. She is dead and buried. I am a lonely, distressed orphan, Marguerite Bovington by name, and I came to England to beg the aid and countenance of my cousin at the Manor—only I arrived just too late."

"Pshaw!"

"Don't you see my scheme now? Marguerite knows nothing of her English relations. Besides, I have all the papers necessary to prove her identity. My name is Bovington, and I am—in the eyes of the law—the daughter of the late Walter Bovington, merchant, of Cape Town! Andrew, why do you look so glum? Are you afraid to help me?"

"You and I don't know the meaning of fear, Ju," replied her brother. "I'm with you hand and glove if you go on with this, but I warn you, there are difficulties you don't think of!"

"What are they?"

"The trustee of the property is as cantankerous an old fellow as ever breathed, and if he fails to find the heir of Arthur Bovington his own son inherits everything."

"Well, I must fascinate him. Perhaps I might even marry the son, Andrew, and so unite our rival interests!"

"Perhaps you might! I don't fancy Vere Thornton as a brother-in-law, but he is easier to manage than his father!"

"Vere Thornton? Why, a man of that

name came to Baastfontein, just before Jack died. I did not see him myself; but people described him as a good-looking young fellow, rather free with his money."

"He is expected home very soon, and his father hopes to see him master of Bovington Manor."

"And is this your only difficulty?"

"Not quite. You must remember, Ju, in these days people travel to and from Africa pretty frequently. I don't say you will ever meet anyone who has actually known Marguerite Bovington, but you are liable to run against people who have heard of her. Now, fortunately, in figure, hair, and complexion, a general description of you would not apply to her."

"Hair and complexion can be altered. It will be easy to give people to understand I was wasted by illness and grief in Africa, but have now recovered my usual plumpness. Pray have you exhausted your objections, brother mine?"

"Not quite. One remains."

"Pray let me hear it."

"I am by no means sure that even your husband—were he alive ever so—la really the person indicated in Miss Bovington's will!"

It was Julia's turn to look puzzled.

"Why, Andrew, you said just now Walter Bovington was the heir, and hundreds of people in Africa could prove that John was his only son! Why, my husband has told me over and over again of how his grandfather emigrated to Australia in the early days of the Colony, and left a splendid home in Yorkshire just for his brother's sake."

"That's perfectly true as far as it goes, Ju. I shouldn't be surprised if Marguerite Bovington, or yourself as her representative, gained possession of the Manor, and enjoyed it for her life; but all the same, my dear, she wouldn't be the person specified in the old lady's will."

Mrs. John Bovington looked bewildered. "I wish you would speak plainly," she said, irritably. "I hate riddles."

Andrew looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"I have been at a good deal of pains to ascertain the Bovington family history," he said, quietly; "and though I meant to introduce Jack to my worthy employer as her heir-at-law as soon I got the chance, I have known for some time there was probably a nearer relation than my esteemed brother-in-law. Since the old lady's will was read I have known positively that under it Jack would not claim a penny of her fortune."

"You'll say next he was not the son of Walter Bovington?"

"No, I shall not; but, unfortunately, he was not the son of the Walter Bovington who was Miss Rebecca's heir. It's a warning, Julia, that people should not oblige family names for their children; it only creates confusion. Two brothers went out to Australia years ago, Arthur and Charles. Arthur had been engaged to his heiress cousin; but the match was broken off on account of his delicate health. Charles had offended all the prejudices of his family by marrying a Roman Catholic. Do you follow me, Ju?"

"Precisely."

"Old sentimental liking, combined with justice, made Miss Bovington leave her property to her cousin Arthur, his son Walter, or their descendants; but she expressly excluded Charles and his children. Failing any representative of Arthur, everything was to go to Vere Thornton. I have ways and means Squire Thornton and his friends would never guess at. Months ago I found out one of the survivors of the ill-fated Amazon, and he assured me that Arthur Bovington's son, Walter, died on the voyage. The Charles Bovingtons, and their little boy, also named Walter, landed at Cape Town, where they meant to settle; but the bereaved father went on to England, and was one of the few who escaped from the wreck of the Amazon!"

She looked vindictive.

"Well, after all, Marguerite Bovington

won't get a shilling. I can almost forgive fate for disappointing me when I think of that."

"I repeat what I said before, Ju. It may be years before anyone else discovers this. Your sister-in-law might enjoy the Manor for her life, and no one be the wiser."

"My husband's great uncle can hardly be alive now. He would be a very old man."

"Granted. But who is to say he did not marry again, and leave a large family?"

"Then you think it's no use?"

Drew looked at her searchingly. "It's a dangerous game; but if you've courage to play it I'll stand by you to the end."

He rose and kissed her gravely on the forehead. They were not a demonstrative couple, and the caress meant a great deal.

"Do you think it will work, 'Drew'?"

"It will work excellently if you can marry Vere Thornton; but I warn you, you won't be able to turn him round your finger as you did Jack Bovington."

"I should like to be rich," 'Drew' said, this beautiful woman, slowly. "People call me cruel and heartless, but you know I never had a chance. I might have been good for something if I had not been poor."

"Jack Bovington was not a particularly poor man, Julia, when you married him."

"But I led him into extravagance. I confess I did it; but it was so spiteful Marguerite! I tell you, 'Drew, I hated that girl. She gave herself airs, and set up to be a saint, and wanted to draw her down to my level."

"I know. We reckless step-children of fortune can't help a fierce dislike of more favoured people. Do you suppose I have never felt it, Ju—these years when I have been at Rebecca Bovington's side and only married by some of her friends, patronised by others? Why, my girl, there have been times when my blood boiled at the insolent and humiliating I had to bear."

"And you disliked this Squire Thornton?"

"He was one of those who delighted you?"

"I detested him and his family, every member of them. That is why I should like you to risk everything, Ju, and claim Miss Bovington's property just to despise them of it."

"And yet you want me to marry Vere?"

"Because it would be such a glorious revenge. He is as proud as Lucifer. He thinks a woman can't be good for anything unless she has a long pedigree, and what he calls true blood. I should like you to win his affection, for him to make generous settlements on you, and the marriage to be placed. Think what a triumph it would be for you to turn round on him on your wedding day and tell him you had no title of a claim to the Bovington property, and that he had wedded not the last of a grand old race, but a girl born in the workhouse, who had danced in the streets for money, and whom everyone thought a terrible misalliance even for such reckless Jack Bovington!"

A glow came into his dark eyes. His sister's face lighted up with an eagerness which was almost terrible. Julia understood him thoroughly, and she answered with a strange smile.

"They must have treated you very badly, 'Drew'?"

"Like the dirt under their feet. I believe that's what the Squire thought me; but it wasn't that entered like iron into my very heart, Ju. It was his daughter."

"You never said he had a daughter! Surely you did not fall in love with her?"

"I loved her once with every fibre of my nature, Julia, and now I hate her with a like intensity!"

"Did she refuse you?"

"Refuse me! Surely you don't think she suffered me to speak to her of my hopes! Miss Thornton, Ju, always treated me with the most perfect courtesy. She was as polite as she would have been to a lodge-keeper who opened a gate for her. She looked on the idea

of her beauty working havoc in my heart as something absurd. It never entered her comprehension. She regarded the gulf between us as wide as that which separated her from her father's footman. And so my love turned to hate, Julia, and I swore to be revenged on her, and to crush her under my feet."

"Is she engaged, Drew?"

"Not yet. It is said the Bovington lawyer is after her. As though I was not as good as he. I have plenty of brains and a sound intellect. I could hold my own in any society, but I am not given the chance. I am down, and people conspire to keep me down. Because our father was a scoundrel, he deserted his wife; because you were born in a workhouse, and I was bred up in a pauper school, we are trampled under foot!"

"But one knows it, Drew!"

"No one; but yet it has left a wound on me like the wound of Cain. Julia, I don't think our dark deeds ought to be laid to our own account. We are driven to do what we see because we are social outcasts. The world forgives everything nowadays to those that are rich. It treasures up the slightest false step of the poor!"

"That is agreed," said Julia, after a long silence. "I am Margarette Bovington, and I claim my rights. Where had I better go down to London, Andrew?"

"Not yet. I shall remain here for a narrow space. There is a chance of my finding in the village where we would live, and I'll let you know when it comes. You see, Julia, you must wait long enough for the English newspapers with the advertisement for Walter Bovington's house to reach Africa. Then, if you started at once, you must allow a clear seven weeks from the date of the first advertisement. It would be safe by the end of January, or, better, early in February."

"That is a long time!"

"How are you off for money? I have saved a little, and can help you, my girl!"

"I have thirty pounds. It will take about ten to play the part. I must have various little contrivances to disguise me as Margarette; but living here does not cost much. Draw, and I don't want to prey upon you."

The man's face softened largely.

"You couldn't do that, Julia; we've always pulled together, you and I. I'd never have left you in Africa, only I felt someone ought to look after things in your interests. When you are Mrs. Vere Thornton, and mistress of Bovington Manor, you shall be as ashamed of your old reprobate of a brother!"

The plan was not carried out quite on its original lines. When Andrew Duncan discovered that Vere Thornton was likely to be despatched to Africa, to make inquiries, he decided it would be better for the beautiful claimant not to appear at Bovington until he had fairly started. Even then one point in the programme failed.

He did not find out that Vere had actually seen the true Margarette, or else he would certainly have shown his sister a photograph of young Thornton, and coached her up in his ways. This was a weak point in their armour; but other things favoured them—notably what Andrew called the "split in the enemy's camp," meaning the Squire's quarrel with Claude Maitland.

Had the lawyer been in and out of The Sycamores every day he would certainly have found out the discrepancies in the claimant's story, while poor Mrs. Thornton and Kitty were far more anxious to get rid of her than to prove her an impostor.

Kindhearted women, without one trace of mercenary feeling, they would not have graded their guest wealth or position, and would thankfully have seen her established at the Manor, if only she had freed them from her unwelcome presence.

This was the introduction to the arrival at Bovington of the beautiful claimant. The rest of her story we know. Her conversation with Andrew Duncan, her warm attachment to her brother, gives the reason why she

had been so bitterly antagonistic to Kitty and Mrs. Thornton.

She always considered they had trampled Andrew's feelings under foot, instead of (as was the case) never even having suspected them.

A very short stay at The Sycamores convinced Julia of two things. She could never win Vere Thornton's heart, since he was evidently wrapped up in his mother and sister, and would see things with their eyes.

Also, from the accounts she heard on every side of the young man's disinterestedness, he would never marry her unless he loved her.

His suspicions, aroused by his mother's prejudice against her, he would be quick to see the points in which, despite her utmost efforts, she had not been able to make herself resemble Margarette in law.

No, if it was to be Mrs. Bovington of the Manor her identity must be established before Vere's return.

There were difficulties on every side. Not only was the real Margarette on her way to England, but Andrew had discovered his suspicions were correct. Walter Bovington, the true heir, had married again, and left a daughter. The lady's grandchild was still alive, and might at any moment advance her claim. It was, then, to attain wealth and position, there was but one road open to her.

The Squire was not much past sixty, and came of a long-lived race. He possessed ample means. The Sycamores and the manor were not encumbered, and though a third of his wife's fortune had been passed to Vere, there remained at least a hundred a year which would be his for life if Kitty married against his wishes. Looking round, it seemed to Julia she might do worse than become the second Mrs. Thornton. It would be splendid retribution to be Kitty's stepmother, and have a hand in governing that rebellious young lady.

They never thought—the two who were so relentless in their cruelty of murdering Lucy Thornton. Julia knew that her hostess suffered from acute heart disease, and that any sudden shock might prove fatal.

It was arranged that Andrew Duncan, skillfully disguised, should waylay her some time when she was out alone, and with much show of sympathy break to her the news of her son's death. She would never rally from the shock, and the way to wealth and matrimony would be clear for Julia.

They had forgotten one thing in their calculation, that gentle and womanly as she was, Lucy Thornton yet possessed an unusually large amount of nerve and presence of mind.

When she came out of the lodge on that fatal March evening, and set out to walk home, Andrew Duncan sprang suddenly from his hiding-place, behind the trees, and announced her son's death. The mother recognised his voice, and answered, with a quiet dignity, that she did not believe him. He was neither a friend of the family nor a post-office official; therefore it was impossible he should hear of her boy's death before the news reached his own family. Stung by the cool contempt in her voice, Andrew fired his pistol, and she fell on the ground dead.

As he bent over her to make sure that life was really extinct, his long gray coat received the fatal stains which were afterwards seen on it by May Slott and Mrs. Cookles.

Duncan took to his heels and fled. He walked ten miles to a distant town, and caught a midnight train there for London. The great coat being lined with plaid, he took the precaution, while still in the lonely country lanes, to tuck it completely inside out; and putting it on in this fashion it betrayed no secrets.

The fact of the pistol found by Mrs. Thornton being her husband's, on which Julia built up her theory of suicide, was easily explained. Miss Bovington got up unusually early the next morning, and carrying the pistol to the scene of the tragedy carefully disposed of it behind some bushes, feeling sure it would be

picked up in an hour or two, and be regarded by every one as the weapon that had been used in the murder.

And now more than two months had come and gone. Everything seemed to have gone favourably for the claimant. Her hated sister-in-law had not appeared to dispute her right.

Kitty Thornton and her mother were gone (she believed) where the wicked cease from troubling. Vere had disappeared, and there was no obstacle between her and the wealth she had struggled so hard to gain.

The Squire, much shaken by all the tragic events of the last weeks, was like wax in Julia's hands. She had hinted to him that now he was a widower their intimacy might provoke much criticism. He answered promptly, he could not live without her. He and she were both alone in the world, with no one's pleasure to consult. Why should she not be his wife, and give him the right to protect her from every untold tongue?

Of course Julia, under proper objections, it was so soon after Mrs. Thornton's death—people would think their haste unseemly work.

"Let them!" said the Squire hotly. "I am my own master, I hope; and you may be sure I shall know how to protect my wife from every hostile criticism!"

So he had his way. There was no remorse in his heart for so soon forgetting the wife of his youth and her tragic end.

He had learned to see everything with Julia's eyes. Mrs. Thornton's end was very sad, but it was far more merciful she should die than linger on hopelessly insane. There could not be a doubt of her madness, and surely her children had inherited it!

In his lonely state it was his duty to take a companion to cheer his declining years.

So the settlements were prepared. Julia was far too wide-awake to be married without them.

The Squire was a liberal man, and only too willing to dower his portionless bride. By the deed, drawn up by an English lawyer in Paris, he consented to allow Julia two thousand a year during his lifetime, while The Sycamores and the whole of his property were to be hers at his death.

Mrs. Hurst, who had some experience in marriage settlements, thought the Squire in his dotage.

He had read the Thornton tragedy, and ventured to suggest to the elderly bridegroom there was no proof of his son's death, but the Squire stood firm.

His first wife had died mad, her children would inherit her madness. They would never need wealth, and he wished to show his unlimited trust and confidence in Miss Bovington, who, on her part, brought him a splendid fortune.

Julia's splendid fortune, however, was not mentioned in the settlements.

Mr. Hurst pointing out that as the trustees had never actually acknowledged her as her cousin's heiress, she could hardly be considered to have proved her identity.

The bride, on her side, had vague misgivings that the handsome provision made for Margarette might not be available for Julia Bovington.

However, her adviser in chief telegraphed from England that it was all right, and so she gave herself over to the joy of purchasing a trousseau.

The Squire gave her a cheque for five hundred pounds, and engaged a French maid to wait on her.

They were to be married at the English church in the Faubourg St. Honoré; but as yet nothing had been said respecting their subsequent movements.

It was of this Julia sat thinking on the fair May afternoon when she was expecting her lover.

The next day was to transform her into Mrs. Thornton, and it was high time they



[EVERYTHING ABOUT MISS BOVINGTON SPOKE OF REFINEMENT, YET SHE DID NOT LOOK A HAPPY WOMAN.]

decided where they would spend the honeymoon.

"We had better go to London," said the Squire. "The season is just beginning, and I am sure you would enjoy a little society."

But Julia had other plans.

"The season can wait, Jim," she said, gravely. "You must take me home first. There, when everyone scorned me and put upon me, you must show the world that you loved and honoured me enough to trust me with your name."

The Squire winced. He believed implicitly in his bride. He was ready to do all honour to her, and would have knocked anyone down who dared to remonstrate with him on his second marriage.

But, the fact remains, he was not anxious to spend his honeymoon at The Sycamores.

A man may be very certain he is in the right, and yet not care to deliberately go among those who think him wrong.

Obstinate and tyrannical as James Thornton was he was honest himself, and could appreciate honesty in other people.

He knew that the Boltons and Claude Maitland, however much he differed from them, were true and loyal to the core. They had taken an opposite side from himself, and he thought them mistaken. But he knew they acted from strong convictions.

To take Marguerite as his bride among people who honestly believed she was the cause of his wife's unhappiness, and his children's strange disappearance, seemed to him a needless insult.

"Surely, dear, you can't want to go back to that gloomy house? I shall never forget the misery of those last days at The Sycamores," he began, feebly.

"I don't care a jot about The Sycamores. I want to go among the people who slighted me and jered at me when I was a defenceless orphan, and to show them how you thought of me; that you—who possess one of the noblest

names in Bovington—have trusted me sufficiently to make me your wife!"

"But, Marguerite, they won't be friendly." He stopped, for he was getting into confusion.

"My love, what does it matter what a few pigheaded country folk think of you?"

"They will cringe to me now," said Julia, emphatically. "The mistress of The Sycamores can't be put upon like a friendless stranger. Oh, yes! They will all be ready to welcome your wife, though none of them had a word of kindness for Miss Bovington."

"I don't think that will make any difference," confessed the Squire. "Bolton's an obstinate fellow, and will never confess himself in the wrong."

"I mean to make him," said the bride, firmly. "He has kept us waiting long enough for his caprices. He and Mr. Maitland will have to acknowledge me as Rebecca Bovington's heiress, and hand over my inheritance."

She carried her point. She was married to James Thornton the next day, and left by the night mail for England, reaching Victoria station a little before nine, and feeling secure that her influence over her elderly husband would ensure their taking an early train for Bovington.

She was a splendidly handsome woman. Weeks of ease and luxurious life had repaired the ravages excitement and dissipation had made in her good looks.

Dressed in the perfection of Paris taste, her hair still dyed to a shade that resembled her sister-in-law's, she looked as little like the wife who had forsaken her husband on his death-bed as could have been imagined; and yet a young girl who caught sight of the happy pair as they passed through the ticket barrier turned as white as a sheet as her eyes met those of Mrs. Thornton.

"I could not help it, aunty," said Marguerite—the true Marguerite Bovington—when Miss Pierrepont had taken her into the ladies' waiting room, and tried to restore her colour by smelling salts and a glass of cold

water. "Of course it was only a fancy, but that lady reminded me of the dreadful woman who was poor Jack's wife."

Her old friend was kindness itself, as the soothed the trembling girl.

"I wish I could make you drink Lethe, Meg; then these sad memories would not trouble you. Only a week ago I found you in tears because you had seen a gentleman whose face reminded you of Africa, and now—"

"Ah! but he was good and kind," interrupted Meg; "and he spoke to me, aunty, and I am sure it was the same."

"He told you a romantic story of being shut up against his will by a man whose very name he did not know, and you believed it, and hurried me up to London to attempt to redress his wrongs. My dear, we have come on a wild goose expedition, I greatly fear."

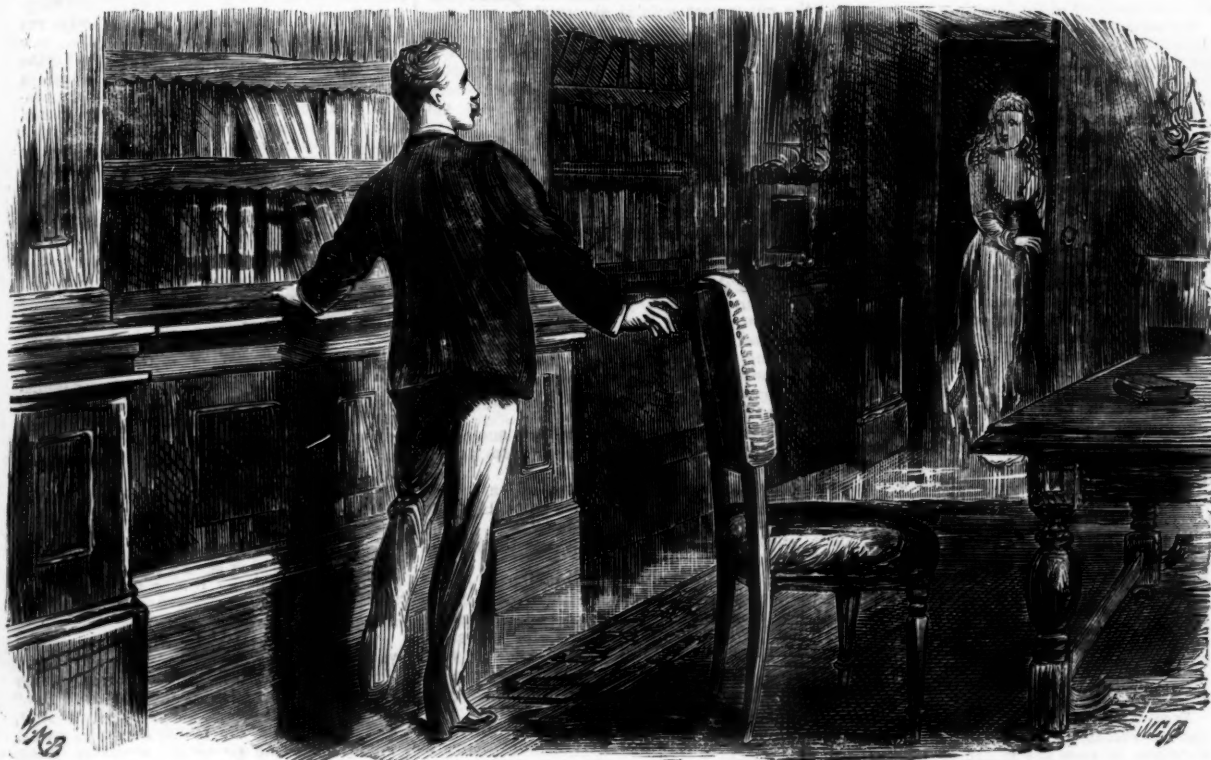
"I don't think so," said Meg, gravely. "The name and dates fit in exactly with the advertisement I showed you; and you are so good and kind, aunty, even if the gentleman Mr. Martin is seeking turns out not to be my poor friend, you will forgive me for having dragged you up to London needlessly?"

"I will forgive you anything, Meg, so that you look happy," said Miss Pierrepont, fondly.

And then the two ladies got into a cab, and gave the driver the address of Kenneth Martin's chambers.

(To be continued.)

Long pneumatic tubes for carrying letters and parcels are once more to be tried, on account of the invention of a new system of switching at intermediate points. Tottenham Court-Road has tubes quite ready, as they were laid down many years ago; money, therefore, was undoubtedly sunk in that attempt to carry out the principle, but a present success may obliterate the memory of past failures.



[LAMOTTE WAS SO STARTLED THAT HE COULD ONLY STARE TILL THE APPARITION HAD SLOWLY WITHDRAWN !]

NOVELLETTE.]

BEATRICE HALDANE'S TEMPTATION.

CHAPTER I.

It was a miserably wet day—one of those downright, uncompromising days that not even the most sanguine of temperaments can hold up against—a day when the skies were low and leaden, the air was cold and nipping, and the slate roofs of the houses shone with a spurious kind of lustre.

The fact that it was May, a month when we not unreasonably look for sunshine, did not tend to make it any the more exhilarating; but, hopeless as it seemed, the influence of the weather could hardly account for the look of despair that was on Beatrice Haldane's face, as she knelt in front of her tiny window, and gazed out at the melancholy prospect—the squalid backs of houses with their pitiful little attempts at gardens, which, for the most part, were devoted to laundry rather than horticultural purposes!

And yet, she seemed like one upon whom Nature would love to shower her brightest gifts—a tall, queenly girl of nineteen, with great dark eyes, shaded by thick lashes, and the most regularly classical features—a girl whom a painter might have chosen as his model for Zenobia or Cleopatra.

Perhaps this very beauty of hers had proved her bane. Middle-aged mothers of families seldom feel an overwhelming desire to have their own fading charms contrasted with the fresh young loveliness of an excessively pretty governess, and Mrs. Tuke was no exception to the rule. Many a time and oft had she caught the glance of her corpulent spouse straying in the direction of Miss Haldane—and it is to be feared Miss Haldane had been made to suffer for delinquencies that should

of right have been visited on the erring Tuke!

This morning, at breakfast, these glances had been more admiring than usual, and after the departure of her lord and master—who was an ironmonger in a large way of business—Mrs. Tuke had given the governess what she was pleased to term “a piece of her mind!” This, in plain English, meant a torrent of vulgar abuse, that made the poor girl tingle with shame to the very tips of her fingers.

“What do you think is to become of you, if you enter respectable families, and then do all you can to upset the happiness of married people, as has never had a misword before you and your impudent black eyes came in the way?” demanded the irate lady. “There was my eldest son, Joe, who had to be sent to London all on purpose to get him out of your entanglements, and now you must needs try your tricks on my husband! But you had better mind what you are up to, my lady, for if I catch my husband staring at you again—and what he can see in you I, for one, can't make out—I'll send you packing, bag and baggage, and without a character too! Then, what will become of you, I should like to know?”

Beatrice had made no reply. To protest her innocence of any desire to attract either “Joe” or his father would have been utterly useless, and she knew it; so, without uttering a word, but with crimson cheeks and beating heart, she had run out of the room, upstairs to the little garret she called her own, where at least she was free from that dreadful woman's tongue.

What a life hers was! Up at six o'clock every morning, washing and dressing four snub-nosed, freckle-faced young Tukes, who did not scruple to kick and scream if their governess had the misfortune to displease them; teaching these same children five hours out of the twelve, and having the pleasure of their company the other seven! And all for

the munificent sum of twelve pounds per annum!

“Oh! I cannot go on with it. I cannot!” Beatrice cried, with a hard, dry sob in her voice. “Death itself would be preferable!”

A terrible prospect, indeed, for a girl of nineteen, with all her life before her! But on all the wide earth there did not exist a creature more utterly desolate and friendless than this beautiful Beatrice.

Relations she had absolutely none, so far as she knew. At two years old she had been placed in a third-rate school, where she had remained until she was eighteen—acting, during the last four years, more as a teacher than a pupil.

Then the school had suddenly collapsed, the proprietress—Miss Payne—going to Australia to avoid her creditors, and Beatrice accepting the first situation that offered itself, as a means of securing a home.

For twelve months she had been the victim of Mrs. Tuke's vulgar tyranny; but now she resolved to break her bonds at once and for ever, and seek her fortune out in the wide world. Hard and pitiless it might be, but not harder or more pitiless than a jealous woman!

Of course she intended going to London—that great centre whither all the currents of life are tending—and deep down in her heart lay a project which she had never mentioned to a living soul.

She intended to become an actress—to embody in some tragic conception all the misery and sorrow of her young life—to move men's hearts as her own was moved when she read the story of Juliet and Desdemona.

For a long time she had brooded over this idea, but it required a crisis like the present to render it active. Besides, she had been hoping to save a little money from her meagre salary in order to pay for her journey, and leave her enough to support herself for a few weeks in case she failed to get employment.

But in her passionate anger at the insult

that had been put upon her she lost sight of all considerations of prudence.

The contents of her purse amounted to just three pounds ten shillings—not much between her and starvation!—and her wardrobe was so scanty that she easily stowed it away in a small black hand-bag.

Having done this, she arranged herself in a little turban hat, a cloth jacket, and a pair of irreproachable gloves. Poor as she was, Beatrice had always contrived to wear good gloves; and then, without one backward glance, and with a firm forehead, she descended the stairs, quite prepared for an encounter with Mrs. Tuke, or with anyone else who might try to intercept her.

However, as it happened, she did not meet a creature. The children had gone to spend the day with an aunt in the country, and their mamma, exhausted by her disfigurement, was reclining her enfeebled energies by a glass of sherry in the "parlor."

The door closed behind Beatrice, and she paused for a moment on the threshold, breathing in a delicious breath of freedom.

Yet, in spite of the pelting rain, the muddy pavement, the little stream of turbid water flowing down the gutters, she felt a new sense of joyousness—of power even, that her small surroundings could not touch.

She had health, youth, and beauty, and she was going forth to the battle of life!

No doubt came to her, no misgivings of what the future would bring forth. If, indeed, the dark curtain of Destiny could for one moment have been lifted, and she had beheld the secret of the coming years—seen them, at the eleventh hour, she might have turned back, rather than face the tragic drama towards which Fate was hurrying her.

It was not far to the railway station, and she was just in time to catch a train to Stoke Junction, whence she would be able to proceed straight to London.

Soon she was whirling along through scenery that grew delightfully pretty as the express advanced on its southward journey; and presently the rain ceased, the clouds drifted apart, and watery gleams of sunshine struggled through.

Beatrice hailed it as a happy omen, and her spirits rose with every mile that increased the distance between her and the scenes of her bondage.

At Stoke she had half an hour to wait before the London train came in.

The junction was a small one, and the only person on the platform besides herself was a tall, slender girl, with a delicately pretty face, and a quantity of feathery, golden hair—hair that rebelled furiously against all artificial restraint, and had a trick of straying in charming love-locks round its owner's face.

Perhaps it was because she was alone that she attracted Beatrice's attention, or it may have been her pretty face; anyway, our heroine gazed at her, watching her, and wondering as to her history—who she was, where she was going, how it chanced that she was travelling by herself.

Presently she accented a porter, apparently to ask him where the up-train came in.

He pointed to the other side, and she then advanced to the end of the platform, evidently with the intention of crossing.

The crossing was a level one, but there was a board put up, warning passengers not to use it, but to cross by means of the bridge.

The girl either did not see, or did not choose to see this board, for she advanced quietly over the rails, after one glance to assure herself that no train was coming.

When she was about midway across, her purse, which she held in her hand, fell to the ground, its contents scattering in all directions.

With a little exclamation of dismay she stopped to pick up the coins; and so intent was she on this employment that she forgot her very dangerous position, until a loud cry from Beatrice—who had been watching her—made her look up.

Then she saw that a train had come round the curve just outside the station, and was rapidly advancing towards her. It was an express, and it came tearing along at a terrific speed, like some horrible, panting monster bent on destruction. So near was it that it seemed to her she already felt the cloudy rush of hot steam in her face.

It seemed as if her nerve suddenly deserted her, for instead of coming back—as there was yet time to do—she gazed helplessly round, apparently too bewildered to move.

That a terrible and instantaneous death must have overtaken her is quite certain. If Beatrice had not rushed forward and forcibly dragged her to one side—not a moment too soon, for they were hardly off the rails before the train tore by.

By this time two or three porters had collected, and the two girls were taken to the waiting-room, where some wine was brought to them—of which they were sadly in need, for both were pale and trembling from their recent fright.

When they were alone the fair one seized Beatrice's hands, and pressed them to her lips, fervently, passionately.

"You have escaped!" she cried, enthusiastically. "You have saved my life. How can I ever show you my gratitude?"

"By not talking of it—by not thinking of what has happened."

"But how can I help thinking of it? I know that if it had not been for you I should not be alive at this moment, and it seems to me I owe you a debt that I shall never be able to repay. But," she said, and her voice grew very earnest, "if ever it should be in my power, I will hesitate at no sacrifice on your behalf. Do you believe me?"

"Yes," Beatrice said, looking into her steadfast eyes, which were as convincing as her words.

They had little more time for conversation, for at this moment the up-train came in; and both girls, finding they were going the same way, hurried out to try and secure a compartment to themselves. In this they were successful, and as soon as the train started the younger girl took from her arm a gold bracelet and clasped it round her companion's wrist.

"There!" she said, "you are always to wear that in memory of me. It is my dearest possession, for my father gave it me on my seventeenth birthday. You see, my name is engraved on it."

The inscription was as follows:—
"Bertha Hylton. Born 11th May, 186—."

"And now," said Bertha, slipping her hand in that of Beatrice, "tell me what your name is—for, of course, we must be dear friends, seeing that Destiny has brought us together so strangely?"

There was something extremely bright and winning in her manner, and Beatrice's heart went out to her in a sudden wave of tenderness.

It was so novel and so delightful to have someone who really took an interest in her, that almost before she knew what she was doing she had unburdened her whole history—acknowledged she was friendless, almost penniless, and on her way to London to seek her fortune on the stage.

"You poor darling!" exclaimed Bertha, who had listened with tenderest sympathy. "Why, our positions are somewhat alike, for I, too, am an orphan." Her voice fell, and she glanced down at her black dress. "My mother died when I was a baby, and since then father and I have lived alone together. Oh! he was the kindest, dearest, best father in all the world!"

"But we were very poor. He was an artist, only, somehow, his pictures did not sell well, so it was as much as we could do just to struggle on from week to week."

"Six months ago he was taken ill, and it was not till then that he told me my mother's history."

"She was the daughter of a Baronet, and she

eloped with my father, who was her drawing-master. Her family were so enraged with the scandal that they sent her off, and never saw her again. My father was too proud to make any effort at reconciliation; but as his health grew worse he became very anxious on my behalf, and worried a good deal over my future, for he had no money to leave me, and all his relations were in America. So one day he wrote a letter to my grandmother, and made me promise to post it if anything happened to him."

"Six weeks ago he died, and I was so overcome with grief that I forgot all about the letter until three days ago, and then I sent it off."

"I must tell you we were lodging with very kind people, who were as good to me as if I had been a child of their own, and took every care of me. Poor as they were, I shared their best."

"Well, I got an answer to the letter immediately. My grandfather was dead; but my grandmother, Lady St. John, wrote to say that in future my home was to be with her at Holme Priory, and she would herself come up and fetch me."

"Somehow, the idea of her in our humble little lodgings was abhorrent to me. I could not bear the thought of her presence in the house that my father's death had made sacred to me; so I wrote back saying I preferred travelling alone, and fixing to-day for my arrival. Thus, you see, I gave her no time to prevent me."

"Then," said Beatrice, "you are now on your way to your mother's old home?"

"Yes, it is called Holme Priory, and my father has told me it is a lovely place. But," added Bertha, "I hate the very name of it, and nothing but my father's express wishes would make me go to it. However, things have been arranged for me, and I must submit. There is one consolation—my grandmother is rich, and out of my allowance I may be able to help you. Now, don't shake your head! Remember we are sisters from this day forward, and half of what is mine belongs to you! Besides, I should like to see you a great actress; and, in order to become that, you will want eloquence, lessons, and they run into money."

"I said nothing about being great!" interposed Beatrice, smiling.

"No, but you would be sure to attain greatness. You are so beautiful, you know," she added, looking up into the lovely flushed face with innocent admiration. "Perhaps that is partly why I have fallen in love with you! It is horrible to think of parting so soon."

Beatrice sighed deeply. If the prospect was sad to Bertha it was doubly so to her.

"Yes," she said, "we have not much longer together. The next station is yours."

Bertha's fingers closed over hers, a little tighter, and there was a pause. It was broken in a terrible and unexpected manner.

There came a violent shock, a crash, the piercing screams of women mingling with the deeper groans of men, as, amid the cracking of glass and the splintering of timbers, the train oscillated violently, before it finally left the rails. But for the two girls unconsciousness had come.

CHAPTER II.

HOLME PRIORY was an old, grey stone house, built round three sides of a quadrangle, and with formidable-looking towers at each end. On this May morning the beds on the lawn were gay with the red and yellow of tulips, and farther away in the park the deer were peacefully browsing under trees which were just now in all the fresh beauty of their young foliage.

The sun was shining into the morning-room where Lady St. John was sitting—a beautiful, patrician old lady, with perfectly white hair, but with dark eyes flashing with the fires of youth, and clear and features.

whose usual expression was just a trifle haughty.

Opposite to her was her second cousin, Ernest Lamotte, a young man of six or seven-and-twenty, whose face would have been handsome but for its habitual expression of deep melancholy.

"It was a dreadful scene," he said, referring to the accident of the day before. "I hope I may never look upon such an one again."

Lady St. John shuddered.

"I am glad I was not there," she said. "My poor Bertha, what an awful shock it has been to her! She is still lying only half-conscious; but Dr. Vernon says this state of coma is the best thing that could have happened to her, since it prevents her mind from dwelling on that terrible moment. How thankful I am that Heaven has spared her to me! 'Till I saw her I had no idea how dear to Madeline's child was to me."

"She is a lovely creature!" Ernest returned, "and she is very like you."

"Yes, she is exactly what I need to be at her age. There is no trace of Stephen Hylton in her face, and for that I am grateful! Ah!" as a horse passed the window, "here comes Dr. Vernon! I will go out and meet him."

The doctor was a man of less than thirty—a singularly handsome man, with a shrewd, kindly face, and keen grey eyes that looked as if they would pierce through all sham and deceit at a glance.

"I will go upstairs with you, Paul," said Lady St. John, who had known the young man from boyhood. "I am very anxious to see how my granddaughter is, though I have been obedient to your commands, and stayed out of the room as much as possible."

The doctor smiled as he followed his condresser up the wide oak stairs, along richly carpeted corridors—where the light filtered in through magnificent stained glass windows—and finally into a room that might have been the bower of some princess.

It was furnished to the daintiest and most costly fashion. The carpet was in the palest shade of green, strewn over with apple blossoms—so real, that the foot hesitated to press them. On the toilet table stood a silver shield-mirror, and the bed hangings and curtains were of apple blossom chintz, lined with delicate rose velvet.

But it was on the occupant of the bed that the eyes of the visitors immediately fixed themselves—a lovely girl, with silky masses of black hair falling over the pillows, and features almost faultless in their delicate beauty. The eyes were closed, the thick lashes lying on the creamy cheeks, and the only colour in the face contrasting on the lips, which were faintly crimson.

A nurse stood by the bedside, but she moved away in order to make room for the doctor. As he bent over her, and laid his fingers on her wrist, the girl's eyes slowly opened, and fixed themselves on his, with an expression of puzzled wonderment.

He drew back a little, and her gaze wandered from his face round the room—still with the same bewilderment. Then she raised herself on the pillow.

"Where am I?" she said.

It was Lady St. John who answered this question. Kneeling by the bedside, she covered the girl's hands with kisses.

"You are at Holme Priory, my darling, with your grandmother. Henceforth this is your home."

The girl hesitated quietly to the kisses, but made no effort to return them.

"I don't understand," she said, helplessly. "Everything is so misty."

The doctor, who had been watching her very intently from behind the curtains, here took Lady St. John's place.

"Now," he said, in very quiet, clear and distinct tones, "I want you to reply to the questions I am going to ask you—as briefly

as possible. What do you remember of yesterday's occurrence?"

"Nothing at all," after a pause.

"Think again—try your hardest."

There was another pause, during which the girl's level brows contracted with the effort she was making, but finally she shook her head.

"I remember absolutely nothing—not even my own name," she said at length, and there were signs in her voice of angry irritation at her own impotence.

Dr. Vernon looked at her anxiously.

"Let me assist you," he said. "You were in a train journeying from Stoke to Holme, and when you were near the station the train was run into by another. Surely, you remember the shock?"

"No—my memory is a complete blank. Was there any accident?"

"Yes."

"And I was hurt?"

"Your left arm was broken," he returned, in a matter-of-fact voice, at the same time turning down the counterpane, and examining the splints in which the injured limb was bound. "But that is nothing much, merely a matter of time. Now, tell me exactly how your head feels. Have you any pain in it?"

"None whatever. It seems perfectly clear. Only everything is strange to me, and I can't recall a single circumstance."

"Odd!" he said to himself. Then, aloud, "Have you not yet recollected your name?"

"No," she returned, impatiently. "It sounds supremely ridiculous, but it is a fact nevertheless."

"Bartha Hylton?" he suggested.

She repeated it softly, again and again.

"Yes," she said, presently, "I suppose that is it. It seems somehow familiar." Then she lay wearily back amongst her pillows, and closed her eyes, as if the effort had fatigued her.

Before leaving the room Dr. Vernon gave a few directions to the nurse. At the door he turned once more to look at his beautiful patient—and it was to be feared that professional interest was strongly dashed with personal admiration.

"Well!" said Lady St. John, impatiently, directly she found herself alone with Vernon. "How is Bertha progressing?"

He did not reply quite immediately.

"Her case has taken a strange development," he said, at last. "So far as physical injuries go, she will soon recover. But the shock to her nervous system is a different thing, and I cannot declare with any certainty how long she will take to get over its effects. The brain has received a jar, and the result is, as you see, total loss of memory."

"But her memory will come back?"

"Yes, I think so. There is every hope that it will."

"It is a very unusual thing for a young girl to lose her memory, is it not?"

"Unusual, certainly; but there are many similar cases on record. You see, a shock like a railway accident affects people so differently, and, indeed, your granddaughter has had a marvellous escape. There is no hope for the poor girl who was in the same compartment with her."

Lady St. John shuddered.

"Poor creature! And to think it might have been Bertha!"

"Yes. They were lying quite close together, but the bracelet on Miss Hylton's wrist caught my eye, and there I saw her name engraved. Otherwise we should not have been able to identify her."

Lady St. John was anxious to learn all details of the accident, which had taken place quite close to Holme station; but Dr. Vernon had little time to gratify her anxiety, for he was on his way to visit several other victims of the collision. However, he promised to look in and see Bertha later on in the day, and then took his leave.

After he had gone Lady St. John remained for some time quite silent, lost in meditation.

She was recalling the time of her daughter, Madeline's youth, and all the brilliant plans she had woven for her future.

She was the only daughter of the house of St. John; and the son, Algernon, had, by his dissipated career, forfeited the affection of both father and mother. Finally his life had found a disgraceful ending at Monte Carlo.

Thus all the hopes of the family centred on Madeline; and just as she was on the eve of a splendid marriage, she had eloped with her drawing master!

Poor Lady St. John! Even now she grew bitter as she thought of the downfall of all her bright visions; but, naturally enough, she threw most of the blame on Stephen Hylton, and it is certain that, while he lived, nothing would have induced her to see his daughter.

But at the sight of the girl all the old love woke in her heart, overflowing into a tenderness such as the haughty old lady had never before evinced to any living creature.

Perhaps Bertha's wonderful beauty was not without an effect, and it is certain her supposed likeness to Lady St. John was very pleasing to her grandmother.

"How I will care for her and watch over her!" the old lady murmured. "How tenderly I will nurse her back to health! She shall not have a wish ungratified if I can help it!"

And then she went back to the sick room, and from behind the curtains gazed on the lovely face, into which a faint access of colour had drifted.

Verily, Bertha Hylton's lines had fallen in pleasant places!

CHAPTER III.

DOCTOR PAUL VERNON lived in a gloomy, rambling old place, called the "Red House," his "establishment" consisting of a deaf old woman who acted as housekeeper, and her equally deaf husband, who attended to the house and the garden.

Somehow, the house had got a bad name, and had remained empty for some years before the young doctor took it.

People said it was haunted, that a murder had been committed there, and its victim—a woman—still wandered round the scene of the crime.

Paul laughed at these stories, and declared his great desire to have a personal interview with the ghost—a levity, which made the villagers shake their heads in reproof!

He found plenty to do during the days following the railway accident, in attending to the sufferers. Strangely enough, no one came forward to identify the young girl who had been in the same compartment as Lady St. John's granddaughter, and who seemed destined to be consigned to a nameless grave.

Her garments were unmarked, and she did not appear to have had any luggage with her, so that there was no possibility of tracing her friends.

On the third day after the accident Bertha had so far recovered as to be able to come downstairs, although her arm was in splints.

Lady St. John had sent up to London for a tea-gown, and in this garment the young girl made her first appearance in the morning-room, looking extremely lovely, in spite of her paller and languor.

This coming down was made quite an event of in the household. First of all, a maid was sent forward laden with cushions, shawls, and smelling-bottles; then Ernest Lamotte followed, with the invalid on his arm.

After them came Lady St. John, to see that every precaution was taken; and the rear was brought up by another maid, carrying medicine bottles and magazines.

"It is quite a royal progress," smiled Lamotte, when she was finally reclining on her couch, which had been drawn up closer to the window. "How delicious it is!" she added, gazing out across the lawn, to the sunny stretches of park, and beyond them to

the rich uplands, which lost themselves in the blue haze of distant hills. "I shall never be tired of looking at this view."

Lady St. John smiled, well pleased at the remark; and then pushed up a small table, on which a bunch of purple grapes—just out, as their lovely bloom showed—was set, side-by-side with a small bottle of champagne.

"Dr. Vernon said you were to have it, so you must regard it in the light of a tonic!" she asserted, when the young girl made some demur about the wine, and the words were hardly out of her mouth before Dr. Vernon himself entered the room.

"Is that true, doctor?" queried Bertha, gaily. She had seen so much of the young man lately that they had become on quite friendly terms.

"Perfectly true, Miss Hylton. Are you not very much obliged to me for prescribing you such extremely pleasant medicine?"

"I'm not quite sure. In point of fact, I am not quite sure of anything," she said, her white brows contracting a little at the thoughts her own words suggested. "I seem to myself in a dream, and every moment I am afraid I shall wake up."

"Afraid!" he repeated, taking his seat beside her in such a position that he could study every change in the delicate face.

"Yes, I have a horrible sensation of uncertainty—the sort of feeling one might have if one were walking on the edge of a cliff that any moment might crumble beneath one's feet. Can you explain it?"

"It is no doubt due to the shock you have sustained. But go on! Tell me exactly what your feelings are!"

"They are not all of such an unpleasant kind!" she said, dimpling with smiles. "Indeed, some of them are excessively agreeable. For instance, when I look out there into the sunshine," indicating the open window with one white hand, "I feel as if all my perceptions must be keener and fresher, and more intense than they have ever been before—as if life held possibilities of which I have never even dreamed. I could almost cry with the mere delight of living and being. Childish, is it not?"

"It is the sort of childishness we would many of us give a good deal to possess," he returned, gravely. Then, after a minutes pause, he continued, "Now, I am going to give you some advice—professional as well as friendly. You are to make no effort to think of your past life—let it remain what it is, a blank. It will all come back in time, no doubt, but at present it is best that the brain should have entire rest. You must not read, you must not write. Just live a life of pleasure—like the birds and the butterflies."

"But the birds sing!" she suggested, with a delicious arch smile.

"Very well—and you may sing, also, by-and-by if you are so minded," he responded, smiling back. Then he added, "I don't think it would do you any harm to go out into the garden for a little while—say ten minutes. Should you like it?"

"Should I not?" she exclaimed, with emphasis; and accordingly a hat was brought, and this time, Mr. Lamotte being out of the way, it was Dr. Vernon who gave her the support of his arm, while Lady St. John was called off to a colloquy with a gardener.

I am afraid her presence was not much missed by either of the young people, and to both the ten minutes seemed an unusually short one, as they wandered about on the velvet turf, stopping first at one flower-bed, then at another. The early roses were out in bloom, and their fragrance, added to that of the mignonette and tall white lilies, hung on the air like a cloud of incense.

From the trees in the park came the songs of blackbird and thrush, rejoicing in the rich summertime, and further away, the "wandering voice" of the cuckoo made itself heard like a distant echo.

It was with a sigh of regret that Paul, looking at his watch, found the ten minutes had

expired, but professional instinct overcame his reluctance; and though Bertha begged hard for another five minutes he would not give way, but took her back to her couch, and directly afterwards said "good-bye."

"What a masterful man he is!" exclaimed Bertha, after he had gone, and she was alone with her grandmother. Then she added under her breath, "But I like masterful men!"

"Yes," returned Lady St. John, replying to the first part of this speech—she had not heard the latter sentence. "Doctors are bound to be peremptory—it is part of their profession. Still Paul Vernon is no ordinary man, and his talents are very considerable. I have known him nearly all his life. His mother was one of my dearest friends."

Bertha turned round a vividly interested face.

"Tell me all about him," she said, softly. "He looks like a man with a history."

Lady St. John laughed, and gently smoothed the soft tendrils of hair that lay on the girl's white forehead.

"You are romantic, my Bertha; but all girls are, I suppose. Still, in this case, you are partly right, for Paul Vernon has a history. He is the only son of a man who once owned a very large estate—was, indeed, one of the richest commoners in the kingdom. But he was a spendthrift, a gambler, a speculator, and in a very short time he had run through everything he had—save, indeed, a small estate which was settled on his son, but which Paul gave up as soon as he came of age to help to pay his father's debts. Then the old man died, and Paul set himself to the study of medicine—in which there seems every prospect of his succeeding. Still, it was rather hard lines for a man who had been born to fine estates and a splendid position to find himself compelled to get his own living."

"I admire him for it!" exclaimed Bertha, warmly. "It seems to me that a man is hardly a man unless he works."

To this remark Lady St. John made no reply, but a minute afterwards she said,—

"Poor Ernest Lamotte's story is infinitely sadder, for his life was blighted at its very outset."

"By love?" queried Bertha, innocently.

"No—by circumstances that were too strong for him, and over which a mystery still hangs that will, I fear, never be solved."

"Does he live here always?"

"Yes, and has done so since the crisis of which I speak, when he was accused of a terrible crime, which he was not able to refute. I believed in him, and I offered him my home in proof of my belief. Poor Ernest!"

But Lady St. John did not mention what the circumstances were, nor what was the nature of the crime; and Bertha, though she felt curious on the subject, had yet too much innate delicacy to ask.

She did not see much of Lamotte. He was a great student, and spent a good deal of his time in his own room—except when he was taking long, rambling walks that were some outlet for the restlessness that consumed him.

It happened that he set out on one of these walks that very evening, and, when some eight miles away from home, it came on to rain so fast that he was forced to take shelter in a cottage, where he stayed a couple of hours, until the rain had ceased.

When he started on his return journey it was after ten o'clock—a wild, windy night, with storm-racked clouds sounding swiftly across the sky, from which a watery moon peeped out at intervals, and reflected herself in the pools of water that the rain had left in the ruts of the road.

In order to get home soon he took a short cut which led from Dr. Vernon's house through a narrow lane to Holme Priors.

Just as he gained this lane he was startled by the sound of voices, and drew back into the dense shadow of a group of laurels which screened him well from view. Then he made

out the form of three men, dark and indistinct against the background of the shrubs.

"Hush!" exclaimed a voice, which Ernest recognised as Vernon's—sharp and premonitory, though pitched in a very low key. "Don't speak above your breath for fear of eavesdroppers."

"No fear o' that, guv'nor," responded another voice. "People is too much afeared of your old house to venture near it at this time o' night."

"Don't be too sure. A few minutes ago I fancied I heard the bushes cracking."

"A stout, maybe," was the careless reply. "It is possible," answered Vernon, apparently only half satisfied; "but in work of this kind you can't be too careful."

"I believe you, guv'nor," emphatically returned the other speaker. "I'm pretty well used to all sorts o' dirty jobs, I am; but hang me if I care for this sort of business, pay or no pay!"

Lamotte's curiosity was aroused. What could be the nature of the business in which Vernon was engaged, that seemed to require so much secrecy, and more than that, appeared to involve a certain amount of danger if discovered?

He leaned a little forward, and peered between the boughs of the laurels; but the moon had disappeared behind a cloud, and he had to wait until she came out again before he could see anything at all. By that time Vernon and his companions had passed his hiding-place, and were just entering the garden of the Red House.

But what were they carrying?

Lamotte forgot all danger of being seen in his eagerness, and stepped forward in order to be able to obtain a better view.

Yes, it was a coffin!

CHAPTER IV.

Her youth and good constitution stood Bertha in good stead, and in a very short time she was quite convalescent, and able to dispense with a doctor; as she somewhat sanctily told Vernon, one morning, when he was paying his usual visit.

"Very well," he said, smiling, "then I will not come and see you any more."

"Oh, I did not mean that!" she exclaimed, with real distress in her voice. "I only meant that you had cured me, and it seemed a little hypocritical to be posing as an invalid when I feel altogether robust and well. I am not so ungrateful as you would make me out."

"I would not make you out to be ungrateful, or anything else that was not—"

He stopped, and bit his lip, while Bertha broke into a gay laugh.

"Oh, grandmother!" turning to Lady St. John, who was arranging some roses in a basket, "do you know, I really believe Dr. Vernon was on the point of paying me a compliment, and then he remembered himself, and came to an abrupt conclusion!"

"Dr. Vernon is a sensible man, and knows that compliments are not good for young women," observed Lady St. John, arching her fine eyebrows with assumed severity.

"And what about old ones?"

"Oh! old ones don't care for them."

"Which is to infer that we do!" laughed Bertha, taking up a rose, and pulling its petals to pieces. "Well, I suppose that is true. For my part, I like all pleasant things, and would shrink all the unpleasant ones—if I could."

"You wouldn't do for a doctor, then," said Paul, watching every movement of the girl's slender white fingers, whose tips were as softly pink as the rose leaves themselves.

"No, I don't think I should. What made you choose such a profession?"

"Pure love of it, I think. I am devoted to it, heart and soul. But I am ready to confess there are a great many unpleasant duties attached to it."

"Which you can't shirk?"

"Which I would not shirk if I could," he answered, a trifle sternly. "After all, there is tremendous satisfaction in feeling that one has done one's duty."

Bertha glanced up at him, half archly, as he said this.

He was leaning against the window frame, in an attitude that showed off his splendid chest and vigorous physique to the fullest advantage.

How handsome he looked, with the sunshine striking across the short, crisp, black curls, and heavy moustache!

Bertha's eyes suddenly fell as they caught his. She wondered if he had read her thoughts?

"I want to consult you now, Paul," put in Lady St. John, looking up from her roses.

"What, professionally?"

"Oh, dear me, no!" laughing. "The fact is, I am anxious to give a ball in Bertha's honour, and introduce her to the county as my heiress. Do you think she is strong enough yet?"

"Quite. Why, she is the very picture of health! Roses like hers don't bloom on the cheeks of invalids," asserted Paul; and as he spoke he took the opportunity of having a good long look at the roses.

Bertha was wearing a white cambric dress, profusely trimmed with lace and pale green ribbons. It became her admirably, its cool tints throwing up the rich, warm colouring of her complexion, and her glorious dark eyes. Somehow, she put Paul in mind of a Moorish princess that morning.

"Well," said Lady St. John, "then that is settled; and now I must set to work to make out a list of the guests. Of course you will be one?"

"I, Lady St. John! Don't you know that I have forsworn balls, and have refused all invitations since I came to the Red House?"

"But you will not refuse this!" exclaimed Bertha, quickly. "Surely you will come to my ball?"

He hesitated. The temptation was a great one, how great he hardly dared confess to himself.

"Oh, you must come!" added the girl, in a sweet, coaxing voice, as her grandmother left the room for a moment. "I shall be so dreadfully disappointed if you don't."

"Shall you, really. Do you mean it?" he asked, a little breathlessly, coming a step nearer, and catching in his hand one or two of the rose petals that she was still ruthlessly scattering. "If I come will you promise to dance with me?"

"Yes, the very first dance you ask me for."

"Then I will come," said Paul, drawing a long breath, and feeling somehow as if he had been fighting a battle, and had been vanquished at the outset.

Bertha thanked him with her sweet, brilliant smile, but she wondered a little when, directly afterwards, he made an abrupt good-bye.

She had no key to his thoughts, so how was she to tell that he was angry with himself for what he mentally termed his own weakness?

After he had gone she and her grandmother sat down to talk over the details of the forthcoming ball; and, surely, if a painter had been by, he could have found no prettier subject for a picture than the interior of the morning-room presented, with its rich draperies, its statues and vases, its wealth of flowers, and last of all the two women—Lady St. John, with her white hair and fine patrician old face, and Bertha in the brilliant bloom of her young beauty, a "queen rose in the rosebud garden of girls."

"You must be dressed in white—pure white," Lady St. John said, looking proudly at the fair face, "and your ornaments shall be the pattern of pearls that were my wedding present from my mother. I intend you to take your place as the belle of the county."

Bertha laughed and blushed, then clasped her slim, white hands together.

"How delightful it is to think of it, grandma! The days won't go by fast enough until the eventful evening comes!"

Lady St. John smiled indulgently.

"Your enthusiasm is natural, my love. All girls grow excited over their first ball, and I suppose this is your first!"

"I suppose it is," Bertha answered, with the half painful effort with which she always tried to recall her lost memory. "I think if there had been such a thing as a ball in that past life of mine, which is a blank to me, I should retain some sort of recollection of it. Ah!" she added, impulsively, "what would I not give to remember all those bygone years. I sometimes feel uncertain of my own identity when I think of the gulf that lies behind me."

"But you are not to think of it!" exclaimed Lady St. John, coming round to her, and putting her arm over her shoulders. "For my part, I am almost thankful that there is such a gulf. You belong more utterly to me than you would if old friends and old memories claimed you. I feel now that you are my own, my very own, and there is no one to dispute the possession of you with me."

Bertha smiled up through her tears.

"You do love me, grandma, very much?"

"How much I cannot tell you!" the old lady answered, passionately. "You are my lost youth come back to me. In you I renew all my aspirations, my ambitions, my hopes. All the poetry of my life is centred in you. I should die if I lost you!"

After this little interlude they came back to the business of the ball.

"I shall have to invite Isabel Lamotte, I suppose," Lady St. John said, reflectively, as she glanced down the list of her guests.

"Who is Isabel Lamotte?"

"She is a first cousin of Ernest's, and therefore a sort of second cousin of mine."

"You don't seem to welcome the idea of her advent?"

"Well," said Lady St. John, candidly, "as a matter of fact I am not especially fond of her. Still, I am in duty bound to ask her here. It is quite possible, however, that she may not care to come."

But she did care to come, as the event proved, and she arrived a week before the ball was to take place.

"I was so anxious to see my new-found cousin," she exclaimed, enthusiastically to Lady St. John when the latter presented Bertha to her. "Her story is very romantic."

"Is it?" the old lady said, a little stiffly, while Bertha was conscious of a very uncomfortable sensation as the pale, cold eyes of Miss Lamotte dwelt upon her face.

Very curious eyes they were, of such a light blue as to be almost white, and yet possessing a brilliancy that redeemed them from insipidity.

Miss Lamotte was about six or seven and twenty—a small, slim woman, with a brilliantly pink and white skin, and golden hair. A pretty woman many people called her, but Bertha did not share the opinion.

Indeed, from the very first there was a scarcely veiled antagonism between the two—one of those natural antipathies that defy all reason, and are because they are.

Before she had been at Holme Priors many days Bertha had discovered her secret—she was in love with Ernest Lamotte.

When he came in the room her face would flush, her steely eyes soften, her whole demeanour become subtly different.

At first she seemed inclined to suspect Bertha herself of designs on the young man, and the girl was amused at the alertness with which she watched her. Perhaps it was this that woke up a spirit of mischief in our heroine, and made her infuse more warmth in her manner when speaking to Ernest than there was any strict necessity for.

Ernest himself did not seem to notice this—a less vain man could not be found in the world—but Bertha was rewarded by seeing

Miss Lamotte's face grow very white, and the metallic gleam deepen in her eyes.

A more timid girl might have been frightened by that ominously apitful expression.

Bertha hardly knew what it meant to be frightened, and in a battle between herself and Isabel she would have had no shadow of fear as to the result.

Life to her just now was one long dream of delight. She was idolized by her grandmother, by the servants, by the tenantry.

Her lightest whim was fulfilled almost before it was expressed. Every day some box was arriving from London, filled with silks and laces, and chiffons of every description—presents from Lady St. John, whose one idea was to show off her granddaughter's beauty to the greatest advantage.

And yet, though as a rule she was happy as the summer day was long, there were times when a strange sense of insecurity thrilled her, and she would pause, trembling and trying to grasp hold of the thread of memory that tantalised her with a faint echo of the past.

It was in vain. The veil never lifted—never would lift, so she believed.

One afternoon, some three days before the ball, Isabel Lamotte and her cousin were alone together in the drawing-room. Bertha, on whose arm her grandmother leaned, was walking down the avenue towards the Lodge, and Isabel watched the two until they were out of sight.

"How fond Lady St. John is of that girl!" she said, with a slight sneer, turning from the window, and taking up some needlework—a bright-coloured shawl she was knitting.

Ernest raised his head from his newspaper.

"Yes; it is very natural she should be. Bertha is very lovely and very lovable!"

"Do you think so? There is something about her that doesn't strike me as quite what it pretends to be. Do you know," she leaned a little forward and dropped her voice, "that loss of memory of hers is inexplicable. I have never heard of such a case before, and sometimes I wonder—I wonder whether it is genuine!"

"Genuine! Of course it is. Why should the poor girl pretend not to remember?"

"Ah!" Isabel returned, with an expressive shrug of her shoulders. "That is a question I am not prepared to answer; but there are a good many reasons why such an expedient should be advisable. You must remember that her youth has confessedly been a stormy one. Her father was a Bohemian of the most pronounced type; and no doubt his daughter was brought up amidst a circle of friends whose antecedents would not bear very careful looking into. What more likely than that she had a lover; and now that fortune has smiled on her she consigns that lover to oblivion with the rest of her past?"

Ernest did not reply for a moment, but kept his eyes steadily fixed on the speaker.

"Suspicious as ever, Isabel! When will you learn to trust people?"

Her glance wavered—fell. She fingered her wool nervously, then answered his question with vehement and unexpected passion.

"When I am happy, perhaps, never while I am so miserable as I am now. Ah Ernest! my love was no childish fancy. It was and is so much a part of my very self that it will only die with me."

Her head fell on her folded arms, great sobs shook her frame. Whatever might be the emotion that moved her, there could be no doubt of its genuineness.

Lamotte came over to her, and put his hand on her shoulder. He, too, was agitated.

"Why will you revert to that, Isabel? I thought it was over and done with long ago!"

She shook her head.

"For you perhaps—not for me. It is terrible to me to see you still under the imputation of having stolen the will—terrible for me to see your youth blighted, your career spoiled—still more terrible to feel that you will not let me share your troubles!"

His hand fell from her shoulder, and he

made a quick gesture of pain. For a minute his features were convulsed with the agitation that her words evoked; then they regained their accustomed melancholy calm, and he shook his head sadly.

"Everyone has a cross of some kind to bear," he said, quietly. "Perhaps mine is no heavier than other people's. I have grown used to it now; and more than that—I have no hope that it will ever be lifted." Saying which he left the room rather hastily; and taking up his hat as he passed through the hall went down the avenue, and went out into the high road.

He had not gone far when he overtook Lady St. John and Bertha, who had extended their walk.

"I suppose you won't be anywhere near the Red House?" queried the former.

Ernest confessed that he had not intended going there; but added his willingness to fulfil any commission Lady St. John might give him.

"Then I wish you would call in and ask Dr. Vernon to lend me the second volume of his 'History of Warwickshire.' There is a certain pedigree I am anxious to look up."

Lamotte promised to do this on his way back; and about seven o'clock that evening he found himself in the grounds of the Red House.

He had not been there since the night when he saw the coffin carried in, and, naturally enough, his thoughts reverted to that very strange occurrence, of which Paul Vernon had never mentioned a word.

What a lonely spot it was, with its dark, flat-topped oaks, and its forest of poplars! The last place in the world where one would imagine a young man would come to live.

Ernest thought of the story of the murder, as he stood under the overhanging arch of the front door, and rang a bell at the bell-chamber door, and a maid in a neatly vibrationed dress came to the door.

The entrance was a doorway at length, the door of the house, where Dr. Vernon was not at home, but she expected him every minute. "Would the gentleman wait?"

The gentleman said he would, and was accordingly ushered into a very dismal dining-room, furnished with horrible covered chairs, of the uncomplaining kind in vogue about a century ago. Paul had taken to a good deal of the furniture when he took the house. It was not beautiful, he argued, but it was cheap.

Lamotte waited half an hour, and by this time the evening shadows were closing in round the lonely old house, and the dining-room looked more ghastly than ever in the dim half light. The young man resolved not to wait any longer, but to go to Paul's bookcase and select the volume Lady St. John wanted, without waiting permission from the owner.

The library was upstairs, at the end of a long gallery which led to the rooms that had the reputation of being haunted; and as Lamotte entered it he was struck by the dead silence that reigned, and endeavored to induce that it actually seemed to be felt.

After hesitating for a moment, the young man advanced towards one of the bookcases, wondering whether he would be able to see the title of the volumes in the dusky light, and then he felt a cold shudder catch his ear, and he came to a full stop.

The room contained two doors—the one by which he had entered, and another empty opposite.

This latter it was that opened, and on the threshold stood a lady—a tall, slight figure, dressed in white from head to heel, and with a quantity of fair hair falling about the shoulders.

Lamotte was so startled that he lost all power of speech, and could only stare in helpless amazement until the apparition had slowly withdrawn. Then he sprang forward and tried the door. It was locked.

This discovery restored his self-possession,

and made him laugh at his own credulity. For a moment he had positively believed he was confronted by a being from another world!

But ghosts, although they have the power of gliding through keyholes, are not usually credited with the very reasonable caution of locking doors; and so Lamotte supposed that Vernon must have visitors—though he could not guess who they were, for he knew that Paul possessed neither sisters nor cousins.

Debating this point in his mind he went downstairs, and in the hall met no less a person than Paul himself.

After explaining the object of his visit, he added,—

"But I was not aware you had anyone staying with you."

"Anyone staying with me!" repeated the young doctor, knitting his brows. "Nor have I. What do you mean?"

"Why, I saw a lady dressed in white, upstairs. At least," continued Ernest, almost doubting the evidence of his own senses, "I fancied I saw one."

Paul laughed—not altogether naturally, and there was a gleam of anxiety in his eyes that Lamotte did not see.

"It was fancy, my friend; unless, indeed, the White Lady herself has appeared to you! You know the house is haunted?"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Lamotte, testily. "Of course I don't believe in such rubbish as that."

"I'm afraid I can't explain the vision that appeared to you on any other grounds. I certainly have no visitors, and my housekeeper is much too frightened of the supernatural to venture through the gallery at this time of the evening, or indeed any time. You have been dreaming, Lamotte."

But Lamotte knew that it was no dream. The face, pale, wintry, sorrowful even, haunted him with curious persistence, like some sweet, faint vision; and, strangely enough, he was possessed by an overwhelming desire to see it again.

But this he did not tell to Vernon!

CHAPTER V.

It was the night of the ball, and Holme Priors was one blaze of light from bottom to top. The grounds, too, were illuminated. Japanese lanterns of varied shapes and devices hung from the trees in the avenue leading up to the house; while the plantation on which the ballroom windows looked out was transformed into a fairyland by the jewelled brightness of Moorish lamps, through whose coloured glass the light streamed out on the polished leaves of the laurels.

Carriage after carriage drove up, filled with all the tide of the county. They were welcomed at the ballroom door by the hostess, on whose right hand stood her granddaughter, Lady St. John, in a black velvet gown, and absolutely blazing with diamonds; looked the grande dame she was, while Bertha was a vision of loveliness that was almost dazzling in its radiance.

She wore a dress of rich, thick white satin that fell in straight folds to her feet, but was cut so as to display to the fullest advantage every graceful curve, every rounded contour of the stately figure. The bodice was thickly sewn with seed pearls—no whiter than the lovely neck and shoulders that rose above them; and, besides these, she also wore the parure of pearls of which Lady St. John had spoken. On the right side of the bodice a long spray of pure white roses stretched from shoulder to waist, and a single bud nestled with its green leaves in the coronal of plaits that crowned the classic brow.

No wonder Lady St. John looked proud as she introduced her.

"My granddaughter and heiress—Miss Hyllion!"

As for Bertha, her heart beat high with triumph. The admiration that was showered

upon her almost intoxicated her—and yet she received it as her right—a right divine, as much by reason of her beauty as her high birth, and her position as Lady St. John's heiress.

She opened the ball with the Marquis of Altonville, who was the great man of the county, and whodist it be can pretty plainly how fascinated he was with the beautiful heiress; but after the first two or three dances she grew a little dispirited, and her glance often wandered from her partner towards the door, by which Lady St. John still stood, in order to receive her late-coming guests.

Presently her colour deepened into the loveliest carmine; and if anyone had been noticing he would have seen the pearls on her bosom rising and falling with the quickened beating of her heart.

But her partner had gone to fetch her an ice, and for a wonder she was sitting alone in an alcove of a window—which was transformed into a perfect bower by the roses and palms with which it was decorated.

It was here that Paul Vernon found her. "You are late!" he said, with her brightest smile. "I feared you were not coming!"

He bowed low over the hand she extended towards him, and his reply was a little less ready than usual.

"I feared I myself at one time; but I hardly dared congratulate myself that my absence would be missed."

"You are too humble, Dr. Vernon! Besides, had I not promised to keep you a dance?"

Her glance was full of daring, yet innocent coquetry; and he would have been more than man if he could have resisted it.

And yet how angrily he had been bidding himself at home for the daring of the mad passion that had taken possession of him, and that had made him look forward to this evening with a fever of expectation, whose effect had been to put everything else out of his mind!

Even so late as an hour ago he had declared to himself that he would not venture into temptation; but would hold aloof from Holme Priors, even at the risk of being thought rude by Bertha and Lady St. John.

He had paced up and down this lonely dining-room, debating point after point in his mind, and impressing upon himself the utter hopelessness of a penniless young doctor ever aspiring to the hand of Lady St. John's heiress. He had firmly resolved not to see her again until he had got over his passion; and then—oh, the weakness of human resolves!—he had come to the ball!

He was ashamed of his own irresolution, and his manner was constrained and awkward. Nevertheless, when Bertha extended her programme, he had no alternative but to put his name down for the only unengaged dance, which was one rather late in the evening.

"It is a long while to wait; but I must accept with gratitude what I can get," he observed, rather unreasonably, as he handed the programme back.

"At least you will acknowledge it is not my fault," she returned, looking archly over her shoulder, as she was led away by the partner who had come to claim her.

Paul was not left long alone, being joined a few minutes later by Isabel Lamotte, who sat down near him.

"Where is Ernest?" he asked her presently.

"Gone out! We tried hard to persuade him to come in the ball-room; but he would not. You see," Isabel added, slowly, "he was uncertain how Lady St. John's guests would receive him. He does not wish to give the county people a second chance of enting him."

Paul made no reply—being, indeed, too intent on watching the heiress to have any thought for other things; and Isabel, who was spitefully observant of the fact, got up after a little while, and went outside, glad to escape from the scene of Bertha's triumphs.

With the exception of herself, there was

only one person on the terrace—a young man who was standing in the shade of a magnolia tree, and looking so intently into the ball-room that he was unaware of Isabel's presence until she was close to him.

Then she recognised him as one of the men who had been sent from London to superintend the floral decorations, and, naturally, she was a little surprised at his appearance—more surprised when, acting apparently on a sudden impulse, he stepped forward and said, respectfully enough,—

"Excuse me, madam. Would you tell me who that young lady is?"

"Which young lady?" she asked, a trifle haughtily.

"The one in white satin with the pearls round her neck—there! She is passing now!"

He leaned forward in uncontrollable eagerness, and Isabel saw that it was none other than Bertha herself who was attracting his attention.

"That is Miss Hylton, Lady St. John's granddaughter! Have you ever seen her before?"

But he made no answer to the question—if indeed he heard it.

"Miss Hylton! Lady St. John's granddaughter, is it?" he repeated, with a low whistle that was full of meaning. Then he seemed to remember himself. "Thank you, madam, for the information," he said, touching his hat, and turning away so swiftly that Isabel had no time to call him back.

But when he had gone she remained gazing after him with a peculiarly triumphant gleam in her pale eyes.

"That man knows something of Bertha's past!" she said to herself. "And, if I am clever, I may get to know it too!"

Bertha's triumph culminated at supper, when, taken down on the arm of the Marquis of Altonville, she sat at the head of the table, and her health was proposed by the Marquis himself. All eyes were turned upon her as she bowed her thanks. Flushed with excitement, her eyes sparkling like some deep, dark jewels, she made a picture whose loveliness stamped itself indelibly on the minds of those who beheld it; and Paul Vernon looked away with a bitter sigh, as he thought how little was his chance of ever making that loveliness his own!

When the time came for him to claim his dance he found the Marquis sitting with Bertha outside on the terrace, and Lord Altonville seemed very ill pleased at having his little dance with the young lady interrupted. She, however, rose immediately, and accepted Vernon's arm, and together they went into the ball-room.

"Are you not getting rather tired, Miss Hylton?" he asked, while they waited at the top of the room for the music to begin.

"Tired!" repeated Bertha, smiling. "Oh, no! I don't think it would be possible for me to grow tired even if I danced all night long!"

"You have gone a good way towards proving the truth of what you say."

"Yes, I have danced every dance; and, oh! what bad partners I have had sometimes!" she held up her hands with a little movement of pretended horror. "One of them sawed at my arm as if it had been a pump handle; another trod on my toes, and smiled in my face the while; a third dragged me along at such a rate that I thought my frock would have been torn off my back before we got half-way round the room. By the way, Dr. Vernon, I have not seen you dancing this evening?"

"No. I am not a dancing man."

"Do you mean to say you have actually not danced at all?"

"That is what I do mean, Miss Hylton."

"Then I suppose I must take it as a great compliment that you are going to dance with me, must not I?" she exclaimed gaily, and yet with a subtle thrill of something deeper

in her voice that Paul's ears were quick to catch.

The music began, soft, melancholy, *triste*, and in another minute they were gliding round the room, each conscious that the heart of the other was beating a good deal more rapidly than usual.

Their steps harmonised perfectly; the floor was smooth and polished, and not so crowded as it had been earlier in the evening, and on the air hung the scent of the roses and mignonette that were twined in with the decorations.

On they went, always with the same perfect accord; and not until the last bar of the passionate waltz music throbbed out did they pause.

Paul was paler than usual, Bertha more flushed.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, involuntarily, "What a delightful waltz it has been!"

He did not reply, but he set his teeth hard to force back the words that so nearly rose to his lips.

Master of his emotions, as he usually was, it had stirred the inmost fibres of his being to feel the young girl's breath on his cheek, as his arm clasped her waist, and hers rested on his shoulder.

He was not a man who had frittered away his heart in a dozen idle flirtations. His nature had always been too earnest for that, and so the love that had taken such sudden possession of him was all the deeper and truer.

He made one last effort to keep faith with himself.

"Shall I take you back to your grandmother?" he said, in a voice that was not altogether steady, "or—would you like to go on the terrace again?"

"We will go on the terrace; it is so much cooler and fresher there."

And so they found themselves in the sweet moonlit dusk of the summer night; and then by a common impulse their steps strayed to the little Italian garden where Bertha had taken her first walk after her accident.

In the middle of the lawn was a fountain, whose waters plashed musically as they fell back in their marble basin.

A little beyond was a rustic seat, canopied over with honeysuckle; and here the two young people seated themselves.

From within the soft cadences of the music floated out on the perfumed air, and the charm of the night made itself felt like some potent magician's spell.

Bertha was very near Paul. Her breath fell on his cheek, and the wind brushed the faces of her dress across his arm. She was maddeningly, bewitchingly beautiful in the white radiance of the moonlight; and as he looked at her a sort of desperation seized Paul, and he poured forth the story of his love in quick, detached sentences, very different from his ordinary calm. As well let the truth be told, he said to himself, and then he would go away and see her no more!

"There!" he said, hoarsely, after a few minutes' pause, during which Bertha's face had been hidden in her hands. "I have been candid, and you know the whole extent of my madness. Now I will leave you!"

He rose from his seat, but her hands were on his arm holding him back. Her eyes, all wet and misty with happy tears, sought his entreatingly.

"No, love—stay!"

Presently, when they were both a little calmer, they got up and walked into the plantation, where there was less chance of their being disturbed; and then Paul told the young girl of his struggles. They seemed almost trivial now in the light of their termination; but they had been very real, and very serious while they lasted.

"And you thought that the fact of my being an heiress would prevent my caring for you?" Bertha said, with playful severity. "Why, I

believe I have been in love with you from the very first!"

This assertion evoked so many kisses that she laughingly declared she was in danger of suffocation; whereupon Paul became serious again, or, at least, as serious as a successful lover can be.

"I had firmly determined not to marry for many years," he told her; "but to devote myself wholly to my profession, and to another object that I must tell you of. You have heard the story of my father's debts? Well, I undertook the payment of them as a sacred duty; but in order to effect it I had to borrow five thousand pounds, and I made a vow never to marry until that five thousand pounds was paid."

"Then you see, after all, there is some advantage in marrying an heiress!" interrupted she, archly.

"But I have no right to pay old debts with your money," Paul returned, his brow clouding.

"Nonsense! What good is all the money in the world to me without you? Besides, think how you will be able to devote yourself to the scientific part of your profession, which you love so much, when there is no longer any necessity for you to drudge away in order to get your living? Oh, Paul! I was never so glad before that I am rich!"

CHAPTER VI.

In spite of the late hour at which she retired Bertha was downstairs before nine o'clock the next morning, and sat on the terrace, waiting for the rest of the household to come down.

As a matter of fact she had not been able to sleep. She was too excited, too joyous, too full of sweet anticipations for sleep's gentle popples to visit her tired eyelids.

But there was nothing in her downstairs to betoken want of rest. Never, indeed, had she looked fresher or more radiant—as Isabel Lamotte was quick to discover when they met at the farther end of the terrace. For she, too, was up betimes, but she had a powerful reason for wishing to be beforehand with Bertha.

"Is it not a pity?" she said, linking her arm in that of the young heiress. "They are taking all the flowers down, and the ball-room looks quite depressing. Come—and see it."

Bertha suffered herself to be led away. She was so happy that she even found it in her heart to like Isabel!

Seen in the morning light, the ballroom did, indeed, look depressing.

Half the decorations were down, and the other half were so faded from the heat of the previous night that they presented an extremely melancholy appearance.

A young man was in the act of mounting a pair of steps as the girls entered, but on seeing them he came down, and took off his cap as he wished them "good morning."

He was an ordinary-looking young man enough of one or two-and-twenty, and apparently of the written class. His eyes and hair were both dark, and he might have been called good-looking, perhaps, but for a certain bleared look about the eyes which told the experienced observer that he was an habitual drinker.

Still there was nothing repulsive in his appearance—nothing certainly to stir all the sweet red colour away from Bertha's lips and cheeks, and leave her as white as the petals of a lily. Into her eyes there came a slowly-dawning recognition—then a sudden flash of intelligence—lastly, a great horror.

Her grasp on Isabel's arm tightened until the girl could have screamed with pain if she had not exercised all her self-control in order not to create a diversion.

Her gaze was fixed on Bertha like that of a basilisk; but once or twice it flashed across to the workman, who stood quite stolid and an-

moved, though with a cunning sort of half smile playing about his lips.

"The lady seems ill," he said at last. "Shall I fetch her some water?"

Bertha made a half movement of assent, but as soon as he had gone the spell that his presence seemed to have cast upon her was broken, and forcibly wrenching her arm from that of Isabel she fled from the room—across the passage—upstairs—along the corridor till her own bedchamber was reached; and then she double-locked the door, and sinking into a chair she gave herself up to the task of looking full in the face this horrible revelation that had come upon her.

For the night of Joe Take had been like a ghost from her past life, calling back the memory of all that had gone before.

As suddenly as it had vanished so suddenly it returned—vivid, complete, and overwhelming.

She remembered the accident, the meeting with the real Bertha Hylton, the quarrel with Mrs. Take, that had led to her leaving—everything, in fact, and she saw herself as she was.

Not the petted heiress, the beautiful granddaughter of Lady St. John—but Beatrice Haldane, orphaned, penniless—gaining her bread by the daily drudgery of a governess.

Oh! the awakening was horrible—how horrible words can hardly tell. She had been so happy, life was so brilliant; the love lavished upon her had been like rain to a thirsty flower; and now all was at an end. She must go out into the world again, and seek her own living as she had had to seek it before.

A low moan broke from her lips, and she threw herself down on the floor, where she lay battling with the misery that had befallen her.

If she had never tasted the delights of home and love, and all that wealth can bring, then she would never have missed them; but to forego the draught now that the cup had even touched her lip—oh! it was worse than death itself!

Then came the remembrance of Paul. How she had rejoiced in the night that her money would free him from the burden of debt that lay like an incubus upon him, clogging him at every step he took!

There was no such hope now. His love would not die when he knew her the penniless, forlorn creature she was; but he would keep his vow—that she was sure—and would never marry until the five thousand pounds were paid.

Poor Beatrice! for so we must now now call her. Her thoughts went back to those miserable days spent in the Take household—the vulgarity, the suspicion, the utterly sordid atmosphere. What a contrast to the life she had been leading lately!

"Oh! I cannot go back to it! I cannot! I cannot!" she cried, springing to her feet, and beginning to pace the room with fierce impatience. It was then that some subtle spirit made its evil suggestion.

"Why should you go back to it? Why not stay here, and go on as usual? No one knows all the truth; and if Joe Take suspects it, it will be easy enough to silence him by a bribe. You are injuring no one by remaining; on the contrary, you are giving a great deal of happiness to Lady St. John, who loves you, and who would be miserable if she found that you were not really her granddaughter. It is true Isabel Lamotte would rejoice"—Beatrice bit her lip till the blood came at this reflection—"but to everyone else it would be an unqualified regret if you left Holmes Priory."

"Then think of Dr. Vernon. You could not marry him as Beatrice Haldane, even if it were not for that five thousand pounds and his vow, for you would never let him sacrifice himself for your sake. If that poor girl, Bertha Hylton, had lived, then it would have been a different matter; but you are injuring no one by taking her place, and you are benefiting the man you love best in the world."

Beatrice's face grew white as death, and her

fingers interlaced one in the other, so tightly that the delicate flesh was bruised. A minute later, and she made a passionate gesture of repulsion.

"No, no! I am not so vile as that. Heaven help me from becoming so!"

But she knew the temptation was a terrible one, upon which it behoved her not to dwell; and she resolved to go at once to Lady St. John and make her confession, thus placing herself beyond the reach of any other alternative.

Without a moment's delay she proceeded to Lady St. John's bedroom, where she found her supposed grandmother still in bed. The bright, dark eyes softened into wonderful tenderness as they fell on the young girl's face, but Lady St. John saw at once from its expression that something was wrong.

"Has anything happened, darling?" she asked, anxiously, holding out her arms, into which Beatrice crept with a low sob of despair. "My Bertha—what is it?"

With a great effort the girl calmed herself; and wiping away her tears seated herself on the side of the bed, her hands still held tightly in those of Lady St. John.

"Something that will change the whole course of my life, grandmamma," she said, using the old name unconsciously. "Oh!" with a deep sob, "I have been so happy. My life has been one long dream of delight, and now—it is all over, for ever!"

Lady St. John looked alarmed—as much by the young girl's distraught manner, as by the wildness of her words.

"Hush, darling!" she said, smoothing the soft white hands that lay passive in hers. "You are exaggerating your sorrow—whatever it may be. Besides, remember that I share your weal and your woe. What touches you touches me also!"

"That makes it all the harder," Beatrice murmured. Then she added, in a low, but curiously distinct voice, "This morning I saw the face of a man I had known in the old days before I came here, and—my memory returned!"

"Well!" said Lady St. John; but a shadow had fallen over her own face, as if she feared what was coming. "Bertha!" she added, in a shrill whisper. "Is there anything of disgrace in the past?"

The girl raised her head proudly, and the flush that rose to her cheeks dried up the tears still lingering there.

"No!" she exclaimed, with a return of her old manner, "there is no disgrace—thank Heaven for that! But there is infinite sorrow!"

Lady St. John breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"Then I can bear it! There are only two things that could touch me as you fear—one is shame, and the other the loss of you. Either of these would kill me, I think."

Beatrice turned away so as to hide her face. Alas! one of these alternatives was the very one she had come to reveal.

There was silence for a few seconds, broken at length by Lady St. John, who had been thinking deeply.

"Listen to me, Bertha," she said at last, in low, impressive tones. "Personally, I am sorry your memory has come back to you, for it gives you a life in which I have no part, but I do not see why it should make any difference. I understand, without your telling me, that there was a great deal that was painful in the past, but I think it is better I should not know it! Wait! Is there any reason why you would not wish to sever your connection with the bygone years?"

"Indeed, no!" was the vehement reply. "I have every desire to cut myself off from them!"

"Then do so," said Lady St. John, with a resolute air. "Begin afresh from the moment of your arrival here. Consider all that went before as a dream that has faded with the morning light. It is enough for me that you are what you are—the pride and

solace of my old age. I know, whatever the past may hold, you at least were sinned against rather than sinning, and that is all that is necessary. Let me remain in ignorance of the rest. Now, my dear, leave me. I am not so young as I was, and this agitation has unnerved me. I will try to get half-an-hour's sleep before I come downstairs."

Beatrice saw that the old lady's face was indeed very white, and she looked thoroughly exhausted. To attempt to say more just now would be simply to run the risk of making her ill; so without another word she left the room, feeling thankful even for this short respite.

On the stairs she met Miss Lamotte, whose steely eyes glittered with mocking triumph.

"I was coming up to see if you were better," said Isabel, in her soft, smooth voice. "I did not come before, for I thought you would prefer being left alone; besides, I did not suppose that, in any case, I could have been of any assistance to you."

The colour flashed back into Beatrice's face at the veiled insolence of her tones. Curiously enough, Isabel Lamotte always woke into life the worst side of her character.

"You were right," she returned coldly, and would have passed on, but that the other stood in her way.

"Is it any good sending for Doctor Vernon?" she went on, still with the same vibration of mockery. "Do you think he is capable of ministering to a mind diseased?"

"I fail to understand you," Beatrice said, haughtily. If she suffered, she would at least hide the suffering from this pitiless woman.

Miss Lamotte shrugged her shoulders.

"You are denser of perception than I thought you were! But doubtless the shock of seeing your old lover this morning has unnerved you!"

This was a bold shot on Isabel's part; but it told, for Beatrice fell back a little, unutterable scorn in her eyes.

"My old lover!" she repeated, mechanically.

Then a sudden anger filled her. What had she ever done to Isabel Lamotte that she should attempt to goad her thus?

"You have made a mistake this time, Miss Lamotte, in your endeavour to play the rôle of amateur detective; but I dare say success will crown your efforts if you continue them long enough. Nature evidently intended you for the profession."

"You are insolent, Miss Hylton!" breathed Isabel, white to the very lips with rage.

"You must expect insolence if you set the example yourself!" was Beatrice's reply, as she passed on, conscious that Isabel's eyes were following her, filled with vindictive malice.

Before she reached her room the echo of Isabel's laughter, instinct with a coming triumph, floated up to her, and with this effect—that the idea of her renunciation of her position as Lady St. John's granddaughter became a thousandfold bitterer.

How shall we probe the inmost workings of a human heart? Goethe says that in each one there is something that, if it were known, would make our fellow-creatures hate us.

We are, indeed, so curiously compounded of good and evil that it is difficult to disentangle the one from the other.

It is impossible to follow the various impulses that struggled for mastery in Beatrice, as she found herself once more alone; but it is certain that the idea of being humbled before Isabel Lamotte swayed her very powerfully.

Lady St. John's words, too, had already made her falter in her proposed renunciation. After all, leaving the question of her own happiness alone, would she not deal an irreparable blow at Lady St. John by confessing that she was an alien—a stranger, in whose veins no drop of the St. John blood flowed? Would it not be better to let things take their course, at least for the present?

Poor Beatrice! Her baser instincts were betraying her into a sophistry, against which all her nobler nature revolted.

To defend her is impossible; and yet, before judging her, let us think of her lonely, loveless childhood, of her want of training, of her wretched girlhood, and her slavery at Mrs. Take's!

Think, too, of her proud, imperious nature, and then remember how great a temptation was before her!

She had made one effort to do right, and Lady St. John herself had thwarted it. Now she resolved to keep silence, and see what Time would bring forth.

The warring forces of good and evil had struggled for the mastery, and evil had conquered.

Would the angels who wept over the fall of one poor, erring human soul ever rejoice over that soul's repentance?

(To be continued.)

A ROUSED LOVE.

—o—

A bleak autumn wind was whirling the few remaining leaves from the trees, and blowing into heaps those that already strewed the ground, and the girl who stood at the window looking out on these signs of the season, and away beyond them to a grey and stormy sea in the distance, felt as dreary, lone and cold as the scene she looked on.

"Yes," sighed Nita, "the summer is gone, the winter is coming, and so it is with my life, and I am but twenty-one. Oh, I wish that I were dead!"

She turned from the window with a gesture that was almost tragic in its intensity of despair. And yet, as she had just said, she was but twenty-one years of age, and very fair to look upon, with every sign of comfort and luxury all about her.

Mechanically she dropped into the easy-chair that was drawn up before a bright open fire; and as the heat was too much for her delicate face, she drew the pretty light screen of Indian silk in front of her—for though she was evidently in real trouble of mind, she was instinctively conscious of the slightest physical discomfort.

A true hot-house flower, from her birth no rude wind or scorching sun had ever been allowed to visit her cheek too roughly or too brightly. How was she to bear the fury of life's tempests, or the fervour of its feverous heat or chilling cold?

Poor child! She fancied that already she had felt its heaviest blows, and already she had exclaimed, "Would that I were dead!"

It was not the first time she had said those saddest of words—when they come sincerely from young lips—and unhappily it was not to be the last time, for Nita Bertram had yet much to learn of the world she lived in—that world which young women of her age, in their first sorrow, are so apt to think they know thoroughly.

The door opened softly, and Mrs. Bertram's maid entered, with the noiseless movements characteristic of well-trained servants; and this maid had been in the lady's service for many years, and knew her business thoroughly, and knew her young mistress, too.

"Will madam please to be dressed now?" she asked.

"Yes, Felice."

And rising from the easy-chair, Mrs. Bertram seated herself in front of her dressing-table, the glass of which reflected her flushed face, glowing eyes, and rich, bronze-gold hair, almost as perfectly as nature had made them.

Felice unbound the glittering mass of beautiful hair, and began brushing it, and insensibly her young mistress's excited, irritated nerves became soothed under the woman's quiet, tranquillising touch.

But her glance roved toward the window again, and away out over the grey sea; and suddenly the flush on her cheek grew deeper,

her eyes brightened and opened wide, and then she became very pale.

"I see the ship!" she said, sharply. "Yes, I know her. She is plainly visible, coming up the harbour. She will be in port in an hour or two, and he is on her; and with him is the rich heiress for whom he jilted me when papa lost his money! The miserable creature, who bought him with her gold! But what do I say? Am I not as bad, even worse than she? for I have sold myself for that, and for—revenge! Oa, Felice! what have I done? Why did you let me? Why did anyone let me?"

"There is no crime a woman can commit so bad as marrying a man she cannot love! It is a double, triple crime—a crime against Heaven and nature, against herself, and most of all against the unhappy man she has deceived into marrying her! And I am guilty of all! What shall I do? Oa, I wish that I were dead!"

And turning towards the waiting-maid, her one confidante, she flung herself into the woman's arms, sobbing and weeping as though her heart would break.

The girl soothed her young mistress, to whom she had been a mother, as well as her limited capacities would permit, and as the tempest of tears subsided, she said—

"Be comforted, dear lady! What lovely young lady would not have done the same? When your papa was ruined and died of a broken heart, what could you do, an orphan, alone in the world, accustomed to wealth and luxury from your cradle—what could you do, I say, but just what you did—marry a fine, rich gentleman, who adores you, and to do honour to his choice. And, indeed, Mr. Bertram, if he's not as young and handsome as the other, he's a fine man, and any girl might be proud to be his wife."

"He's a thousand times too good for me, and that's what makes me grieve; for I can never, never reward his kindness and generosity in the only way I should reward it—by loving him as he loves me."

"That will come—that will come!" answered the Frenchwoman, soothingly. "Be sure it will come; and I will prove a true prophet. Why, with us, in my country, no young lady expects to be in love, as you call it, with the gentleman till after marriage. But there's something else to tell you of, cherie. You see the ship coming in, and you know that Mr. Clare and his wife are on board; but do you know that they are to be our neighbours—our near neighbours, madam?"

"Our neighbours!" exclaimed Nita, while every vestige of colour left her face. "I see that the mansion house on the hill is being fitted up, and I see that drayloads of furniture are going there every day. Is it there he is going to live? Oh, Felice, and I must see him every day!"

"That was why I wanted to warn madam—that you might not meet him unexpectedly."

"You good creature! Ah, what should I do without you? But forewarned is forearmed, and he shall learn that I can despise him as much as I once loved him."

Felice expressed her approval of this sentiment; but she had little faith in its continuance as she watched the light die out in her young mistress's face, and saw the throbbing of her white throat, and felt the wild beating of her heart and the fever of excitement in all her being while she dressed her.

"Ah," thought the waiting-maid, "how she loves him! And how will she bear it to meet him everywhere and see him every day?"

Berrytown was but a small place, and every one in it had known of the engagement of the brilliant Miss Vincent to Eric Clare; equally, of course, everyone had known how she had been jilted on the occasion of her father's financial failure; and now the whole place was agog to see how she was going to bear the return of her old lover.

And it was not long before her name was coupled with his in such a manner that a sudden silence often fell on a group of animated gossips at the approach of Mr. Bertram, while meaning looks and smiles were exchanged at the appearance of Mrs. Clare; and if by chance that poor, neglected woman was ever seen in conversation with her rival's husband there were plenty of ill-natured people to say that the pair were endeavouring to console each other.

And Nita—how was she really bearing this hardest trial to which she had been exposed? It had been hard enough to bear the cruel desertion of her lover; but pride and a plying contempt for his perfidy had helped to sustain her—at least in the presence of others; but his pleading looks when they met—his pale face and the low, gentle voice, whose tones dared to say so much more than words could say—how her heart throbbed in response, to feel that in spite of all his treachery, he loved her still!

From that the next step was easy. She had already answered with her glowing eyes the pleading love in his; already her heart had thrilled at his touch. To listen to his passionate outpouring of mingled remorse and love-making, was the simple and natural sequel to the falsehood already begun by looks and sighs, till at length, of course, the crisis came.

They were alone, and the softened light and perfumed atmosphere, the low tones, and occasional half-murmured laughter, the solitude, the reminiscences of the past, an occasional sigh from Nita that was partly for the past and wholly for the present, had brought Clare to a partial delirium of passion and longing for the woman he had lost, and yet might regain.

"Nita," he exclaimed, as he seized both her slender hands and held them, "rightly in my own, 'I can bear this no longer! I love you—I adore you! I was mad to leave you! Oh, why—why did you leave me by throwing yourself away on a man you can never love—'"

"Silence!" exclaimed Nita, tearing her hands with violence from the grasp that hurt her, it was so strong and marvellous. "Don't dare to say such things to me! I have been wrong—wicked, if you like—in ever permitting you to speak to me again, except in the presence of others. But I have never realised it till now. I thought—Heaven forgive me!—that I loved you still, and like other foolish women, that thought maddened me."

"But you do love me?" he interrupted, passionately.

"I do not love you!" she answered impetuously. "I begin to realise that I never loved you—not you—only the ideal of my own romantic, silly, girlish fancy. And that is dead for ever—or, what is more to the purpose, it never existed. If I have seemed to forgive your perfidy, if I have seemed to encourage the return of what I once thought your love for me, I am not so much to blame, though you may blame me as much as you please. I care not! The simple truth is that I have been living in a wild delirium, an insane dream, but you have awakened me, and I shall always be grateful to you for that."

"I have awakened you? I—how?" asked Clare, stupidly.

"Your allusion to my husband! His name on your lips—the pain that thrilled through my heart and soul at the thought that I had even seemed to betray him to such a man as you; but still, I thank you, for your words have revealed me to myself. Yes, you have indeed awakened me, and now I know that I love my husband, and that I have never loved any one but him."

If she had struck the man who now stood before her, crestfallen, humiliated, writhing with jealousy and baffled passion, she could not have surprised him more.

With a ghastly attempt at recovering his assurance, he said, with a sneer,—

"Oh, you love your husband, Mrs. Bertram?"

"So well that I can bear even your sneers, Mr. Clare. And, as for this I shall not wait to see you—even as an acquaintance—I have the honour to say adieu now and for ever. In future we will meet in society only. Good-night!"

Nina's look and tone were so significant that Clare felt himself disconcerted, and with a bow which he felt compelled to make respectful he took his leave.

As the door closed behind him, the velvet portiere between the drawing-room and the boudoir beyond parted, and Mrs. Bertram came towards her wife.

"His face had the pallor of deep feeling, but his eyes were luminous with a joyful triumph. 'I have hated everything,' he said. 'No, my darling, don't shrink from me. I came into your boudoir quite by accident, and all that I heard but served to assure me of what I knew before—that I could trust my wife implicitly. But, oh, my Nina, I heard more than I dared to hope for! Do you—can you really love me as much as much older than you—a man who has only his love to plead for him?'"

Nina's eyes grew luminous, too.

"Leonard, my husband, if you can forgive me and love me still! You are the one man in all the world to me!"

He stopped and kissed her for his answer.

FACETIE.

"Life is a wild man who can't remember ten days after a great deed was done; that it was his wife, and not himself, who did it."

CHRYSTIE: "I should like to see some of your checks for this season." TAILOR: "Yes, certainly, and I should like to see one of yours for last."

A Broomstick dressmaker, not to be outdone by the New York milliner who styles herself a "bonnet architect," has hung her sign on the outer wall as "Mrs. Dress Builder."

"I want to see the head of the firm," said the commercial traveller, as he began unpacking his combi. "It is a bad one," the counter-jumper told him, and he sorrowfully departed.

EMMA: There's one thing that doesn't suit me about this engagement. MATT: "What is it?" EMMA: "Jack didn't have to go to town for his engagement ring. He simply went up to his room for it."

AUNT JANE: "You shouldn't be so free with the gentlemen, Kate. Look at Miss Pringle over there. See how reserved she is." KATE: "Reserved? Yes, for the man who will never come."

MISCHANCE: "Can you manage to make yourself understood when French or Spanish customers come to the store?" Would-be Clerk: "Certainly, if they know how to talk English."

MR. BRUCE: "Did you look up the Chateau d'If when you were at Marseilles?" Miss HURON: "No. Papa asked for it at the table d'hôte, but the waiter couldn't find it on the wine list."

WIFE: "Is there nothing capable of exciting your enthusiasm?" HUSBAND: "No. I'm sorry to say I once felt enthusiastic about something—eight weeks afterwards that something became my wife."

GOD DE SMITH: "The palm of my hand itches. I wonder what that means?" GILBERT: "That's a sure sign that you will get money from somebody to day." GOD DE SMITH: "I'm glad to hear that. Lead me to the editor."

"SPEAKING about journalistic courage," remarked the editor, "I can name a paper which has more grit than any other, and one which you hardly think of, either." "What paper is that?" asked the horse editor. "Sand paper."

Never waste time in telling people what a lot of good things you have done. In the first place they won't believe you, and in the second place they are waiting for a chance to tell you what a lot of good things they have done themselves.

Once a teacher in a school in Jamaica observed a huge blot of ink on a boy's copy-book. "What is that?" he demanded. "Sure, I think it's a tear, sir." "A tear? How could a tear be black?" "Sure, I think one of the coloured boys dropped it, sir."

Doctor: "Your blood is deficient in quality, Mr. Jones. What you need is more iron in the system." Mr. Jones: "That can't be, doctor. I have stepped on at least twenty-two ticks with my bare feet since house-cleaning began."

"I tell you what will draw well next season," observed an actor, seriously. "What?" asked a manager, looking for a valuable suggestion. "A mustard plaster," answered the Thespian, grasping his cane in a convulsive clutch, and determining to sell his life as dearly as possible.

FANNY: "If you are so badly off, why don't you apply to your rich brother in Boston for assistance." POOR MAN: "I did write to him to assist me, and what do you suppose I got?" "I have no idea." "He wrote to me that my letter asking for assistance had not reached him."

COURTLY GENTLEMAN: "May I ask if you were present at the Creation?" Elderly maiden (blushing with quick indignation): "Sir, I do not understand what you mean." COURTLY GENTLEMAN: "I simply wished to inquire if you attended the creation by the church society on Wednesday."

He certainly wasn't handsome, but he had a loving heart. He bought his adored one a birthday present of a pug that broke down all the usual standards of ugliness and set up one of its own. The gift went right to the affection of the gushing maiden. "Oh, thank you, James, thank you," she warbled. "It's just like you, to it is."

EMMA (to Miss Oldgirl, age about forty): "Your work shows promise, madam; but do you know that good literary work is seldom done by a woman until she is thirty or thirty-five? Several years hence you will be able to write available articles." Miss Oldgirl (as she left): "That was the most delightful man I ever met!"

MRS. O'ROURKE: "I wish you would give me an order for some medicine, your reverence, for little Jimmy, here. He's been ailing for two weeks." Father Reilly: "I think a little soap and water would do him as much good as anything." MRS. O'ROURKE: "Would you give it to him before or after his meals, your reverence?"

"I don't understand how you can be away from home so much. You are off travelling two-thirds of the year," said a homely mother, who stays at home, to her married daughter. "My dear mother, I know why I am away so much. My husband never appreciates me except when I am away from him, and I want him to appreciate me as much as possible."

"SINCE how marriage changes women." How? "This morning, after a visit to an old school friend, just wedded, she told me she wanted 'all set of six new chairs' and a sofa like hers, and yet when I was courting her, I don't believe she knew or cared whether there was more than a single chair in her father's parlour."

A YOUNG LONDONER went for a first visit to Scotland, and on his return boasted abundantly. He had ascended every mountain and seen every mountain and seen everything of interest. A Scotchman in the company asked, with something of a mysterious frown, but very quietly, "Did you see Ben Lomond when you were there?" The boaster was taken aback by the question; but he drew himself together, and replied: "No, I did not. I called on him, but he was out."

WIFE: "That pane of glass has been out all summer, and now a freezing cold day has come and we need it in. I've told you forty times to send a man here to fix it. Why in the world haven't you done so?" HUSBAND: "Because I can't fix it myself."

"TAKE back the heart though you will," they should I take it back?" There was a hush of expectancy and the listeners leaned far out over the verandah to catch the dying notes of Love's lyric. "Because," came the reply, watted softly on the wings of evening, "because the boarders won't eat it." It was the butcher.

"No," observed one of the neighbours who had called to see the new baby, "the child's mouth is none too large. And see how mobile and flexible it is. You will live, Mrs. Banks, to see this little girl become an accomplished elocutionist." And the young father, who had been listening unobserved at the door, went off up stairs, crawled into the attic, and wept.

MR. HIGHER (shop-walker for the firm of Spoteash and Co.): "Ab—Mr. Spoteash, if I should wish to take my vacation the first week in September, would it—aw—be asking too much?" MR. SPOTEASH: "Not at all, Higher, not at all. Spare you just as well as not." MR. HIGHER goes out of chief's private office with the mercury in the thermometer of his self-conceit several degrees lower.

It's really becoming awkward, as Dr. Tetters says. He called at the house of Dr. Johnson, and was shown into the surgery. A lady in spectacles advanced and asked him pleasure. "Oh, the fact is, I hardly like to say." The lady: "Oh, you need be under no apprehension; we have very serious stories every day." "Well, I hardly like to say, the fact is, madame, Dr. Johnson and I were students together, and I called to see if he couldn't give me a coat and a pair of trousers, just for the sake of old times. Many old—The lady (drawing herself up): "I am Dr. Johnson."

The door of the family sitting-room was opened, and Bridget put her head in. "We go to give you 'warm,' Mrs. Waxter," she said. "I shall have you next Monday." "What is the matter, Bridget?" asked her mistress. "I don't mind 'yer forbidden me young man to smoke in the dinin' room after supper," said Bridget, "nor 'yer boyin' a dress that doesn't harmonise wid me complexion, but when 'yer close all dures up at bedtime, mum, to kape me from 'hearin' what 'yer fusturin' Mr. Waxter say, it shows a want of confidence that hurts the feelin', an' I won't stand it from nobody. Good-evenin'."

"You look worried, my dear," said Unders when he came home from the office the other day. "What is the matter?" "This child has been very tiresome to-day," replied Mrs. Childers, wearily. "It seemed as if they would make me distracted." "Don't let 'em!" said Childers with considerable energy. "Don't let 'em ride over you. Just Willie, don't talk when papa's talking—just deal with them gently but firm—Did you hear me, Willie?—firmly, and you'll get along all right. Silence, Willie, this instant—all right. As for letting 'em worry—Don't pull on my pockets, Dick—letting 'em worry—Dick! don't pull on my pockets, I said—worry—Will you take your hands out or not? Now keep them out. You've broken a couple of cigars for me now, you—What's Willie making such a racket about, Annie? Great Scott! He's got my silk hat. Take it—hang it up high. Now, Dick, if you cry you'll have Lord, they've both commenced. It doesn't seem, Annie, 'sif the minute I come into the house—I can't talk—I can't think. Won't you take 'em off to bed? My gracious! I'll bet if I was home I'd—" But as the boys observed away up the stairs with their tired mamma Childers sat down and gazed gloomily into space without saying just exactly what he would do if he was home.

SOCIETY.

THE QUEEN is to leave Windsor Castle for the Continent on Tuesday, the 24th of March, accompanied by Prince Bessie and Prince Henry of Battenberg.

To be really fashionable just at present you must possess some piece of jewellery in the shape of a heart.

In Australia there are many women's clubs. The principal dentists have women assistants, and a woman has begun business as a house decorator.

Lord Rosebery has decided not to go abroad for some time. His children are not of the strongest, and he has a very natural fear of leaving them to travel in distant lands.

Thirty European nations have women at the head of their governments to-day—England, Spain, and Holland. Of these, Spain and Holland are under regencies.

The Duke and Duchess of Argyll, who have been residing for about four months at Inverary Castle, intend to stay there until the middle of April, when they will come to town. The Duke's health has much improved during the last few weeks, but he requires great care.

The Emperor of Austria has made a present of an island in Dalmatia, the property of his deceased son, Rudolph, to the Jesuit Fathers. The Order is going to construct there a magnificent monastery. It is said the Emperor makes this gift at the suggestion of the Empress.

Wash your make chocolate sprinkles a little cinnamon on top after the chocolate has been poured in the top. It adds the same piquancy and charm that nutmeg adds to lemonade, lemon juice does to Vichy, sliced lemon does to tea, or, to come nearer home, this will do to an egg.

Kaiser Wilhelm chose rather a remarkable Christmas present for his baby son—namely, a sub-lieutenant's commission in a line regiment. Of course, the veterans of the corps must feel highly honoured at the distinction conferred upon them, but in Berlin the "subs" of the regiment are being unmercifully chaffed about their "comrade-in-arms."

Prince Francis of Teck is making himself immensely popular in Essex, as well with the country people as with his brother officers in the "Royals." He is full of fun, and is as bright, energetic, and genial as his popular mother. He is what sportsmen call "a good all-round man," being a good shot and a good rider. Then his excellent walking boots favour with womenkind.

The inhabitants of the Hague are delighted at once more having Royalty in their midst, and the night of the day is the little Queen taking her afternoon drive in a sleigh drawn by four ponies. Both the Queens had the simplest of lives, and Queen Wilhelmina has returned to her books and masters, just as if she was still at Het Loo. Her father's old nurse (who had been present at his birth in Brussels) died a few days ago, at the age of a hundred, and was buried with great state in the cathedral of Breda.

The Archduchess Elizabeth of Austria, affectionately known as "Die kleine Frau," is seven years old, and for the first time has a tutor who instructs her in German. She already speaks French and Hungarian fluently. She is very shy, from having been so much in the country; but when the tutor told her she would please the Emperor and Empress by making progress, she eagerly promised she would do her best. The little Princess is very tall for her age, blue-eyed and fair-haired, and is dressed like an English child. She is very popular in Vienna, and the children who are out walking between twelve and two, always watch for her as she passes on her drive to the Prater. She acknowledges every child's bow in a friendly manner, and blows kisses to the little ones.

STATISTICS.

A BUNCH of Louisiana rice shows a yield of 4,500 grains from a single seed.

This year, for the first time, the tonnage of shipping in England has exceeded 10,000,000.

There are five rivers over 3,000 miles long in the world.

London has an area larger than New York, Paris, and Berlin put together.

The prison population of England has fallen off of late years. Out of 113 prisons fifty-seven have been altogether closed.

GEMS.

Heaven should be kind to stupid people, for no one else can consistently.

The corner stone of philosophy: If you can't have what you want, don't want it.

All past sorrow has a tendency to transform itself into something else. All sorrow, follies, and errors have their edges wonderfully softened off by retrospection. They become possessions rather than detriments.

MANNER is one of the principal external graces of character. It is the ornament of action, and often makes the commonest offices beautiful by the way in which it performs them. It is a happy way of doing things, adorning even the smallest details of life.

Many persons do themselves a wrong by permitting their feelings to be stirred, and then letting them subside again without an effort in the direction of that which exalted them. Every experience of that sort helps to blunt the moral sense and promote its degradation.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

DEVILED WALNUTS.—Peel some walnuts, sprinkle with cayenne, pepper and salt, fry them in butter until a golden colour, and place them on white blotting paper to drain. Serve cold.

WATER TOAST.—Have a shallow pan with one quart of boiling water and a teaspoonful of salt. Dip each slice of dry toast quickly in the water, then pile on a hot platter. Spread evenly with butter and serve very hot. Do not let them soak an instant in the water.

TO BOIL RICE.—Take one cup of rice, cover with cold water, and let it boil until the water is most gone, then add one cup of milk. When that boils stir in one beaten egg, and season with lemon, vanilla or nutmeg. When done, serve with butter and sugar stirred to a cream.

SPONGE CAKES.—Half pound flour, 1 lb. sugar, 4 eggs, half teaspoon milk, half teaspoon baking powder. Beat sugar and eggs together for quarter of an hour till they look very light, then sift in the flour and the baking powder, and stir gently, then add the milk and the lemon essence. Bake in greased tins dusted over with sugar on the top, and bake about ten minutes.

SALTED ALMONDS.—Blanch the nuts by pouring boiling water over them; let them stand in for a moment; put them into cold water, rub them between the hands into a bowl. For each cup of nuts add a tablespoonful of melted butter or salad oil. Stir the almonds thoroughly; let them stand for an hour, then sprinkle with salt, allowing a tablespoonful of salt for each cup of nuts. Then put them in a baking tin and into a moderate oven and roast them, stirring occasionally, for a quarter of an hour until they are brown, but not too crisp or too brown. A very little more salt sprinkled over them when they come from the oven will improve them.

MISCELLANEOUS.

SHIPS were first copper-bottomed in 1763.

In 1606 any one absent from church on Sunday was fined one shilling.

The noise of the Artillery at Waterloo was heard at Creil, one hundred and fifteen miles from the scene of the battle.

In Buenos Ayres the police alone have the right to whistle in the streets. Any other person caught whistling is at once arrested.

Six or seven thousand workmen are now steadily employed in the various branches of industry connected with Edison's inventions.

In Queen Elizabeth's time London's death-rate was forty per thousand. Sanitary improvements have reduced this to twenty per thousand.

TICKLING the nose until you are forced to sneeze, is said to be a sure remedy for hiccough. Another cure is to gargle the throat with water, and a third to cease breathing for half a minute.

At Munich, says the *Charity Record*, there is a hospital which is said to be entirely supported by the sale of old steel pen nibs, collected from all parts of Germany. They are made into watch springs, knives, and razors.

SEVEN years' inactivity in seal fishing is the only thing that will save the seal from extermination. If the seal subside could be put out of fashion for a while, the same end would be attained.

Of one portion of the East Africa Company possessions it is recorded that horses die at the rate of ninety-nine out of every hundred; sheep cannot exist, being subject to a sickness similar to that of the horse; vegetables are unknown; and even the poultry seem to have their feathers stuck the wrong way.

A NOVELTY in the washing-machine line has just been invented. It is connected with a child's swing, and after the soiled garments, with the proper quantity of soap suds, have been put in the tub, a child is placed in the swing, which is set in motion, and moves automatically, and turns the washing-machine.

A WRITER in a French scientific journal calls attention to an old book printed in 1555, in which is a curious wood engraving that represents a single-wheeled barrow pushed along by a labourer. Another plate of the same book shows a tramway car running upon rails. This points the use of the wheelbarrow back more than a hundred years earlier than the time of Pascal.

HERN ANDERSEN, of Copenhagen, has invented a flashlight fire alarm, which is called the "monitor." It consists of a small cartridge filled with a Bengal light composition, and provided with a fuse made from potassium chlorate and sugar. On the fuse is a strong sulphuric acid. When the temperature of the room rises above the melting point of paraffin the sulphuric acid is liberated, and ignites the mixture of chlorate, which in turn sets fire to the Bengal light. The place can be supplemented by a piece of fusible metal, which in melting will establish an electric current and ring the bell.

INDIAN yeast is made from the sap of the dak-palm. In April, before the flowers appear, a Hindu climbs the naked trunk—for the leaves, he in all palms, are all borne at the top. The man's feet are bound together by a rope, and about his hips are fastened two pots for the reception of the sap. As he climbs he calls out: "Darpur, darpur ata hain," which being interpreted, is: "The palm-tapper is coming." This is for the benefit of the Mohammedan women who might be sitting unveiled in the courtyard of the houses exposed to the view of the climber after he has risen above the tops of the walls. A tapper who once falls to give this warning cry is thenceforth forbidden to ply his trade.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. OLIPHANT.—Mr. Balfour has never been married.
ALAN.—Yes, or he can disown, and so stop the removal of the goods.

BESS.—Fourpenny pieces have been withdrawn from circulation.

EMER.—The 6th of February, 1866, was on a Thursday.

EMERAY.—Broad was 11½. A loaf in November, 1846, and in May, 1847. It has never been so high since.

MIKE.—There being no children the widow would take the whole.

F. T.—You are not obliged to pay property tax unless your income from all sources amounts to at least £150.

G. THOMPSON.—The notice to quit should have reached the landlord not later than the 14th of December.

THE SQUIRE.—Limited liability companies are not compelled to make public their annual balance-sheet.

LAIDA.—Payment on behalf of an illegitimate child ceases when it attains the age of sixteen, unless an order for a specified period is made by the magistrates.

F. B.—The schoolmaster is quite right. He cannot give a certificate until the lad has passed the required standard.

D. D.—Income-tax would have to be paid on the full income, even though part of it were derived from foreign investments.

JULIEN.—Presents given in contemplation of a marriage which is broken off can be recovered in the county court.

POOR NEED.—There is no fixed and defined sum. It is a matter for the judge to determine on the evidence before him.

JULIAN.—The duty on unmanufactured tobacco varies from 5s. 2d. to 5s. 6d., according to the amount of moisture it contains.

ROBERT'S RIGHT.—A publican can refuse to serve any customer, but if the customer sustains any damage by the refusal he can bring an action against the publican.

JAM.—An I O U is not a security in any sense. It can simply be used as an evidence of the debt. It would be better to have a properly drawn up acknowledgment.

NEMO.—The customs referred to are older than any history. You will find much information on the subject in Chambers's "Book of Days."

WILD BIRD.—Payment for an illegitimate child ceases at the marriage of the mother, unless the magistrate's order fixes a period, in which case the payment continues throughout the term.

BALA BLACK.—Osseli's published some time ago a little book on the subject at one penny cost. We are not aware if it can still be had, but apply at a book-seller's.

A LITTLE TRADERMAN.—If the husband was not aware of the credit we fear you will have difficulty. But it may depend upon what the goods were, to whom supplied, and where supplied.

L. G. S. W.—There are many glass bottle makers, but wherever is made at the potteries. There was, and perhaps is still, one at Bristol, but you can see by consulting a directory.

KITTY.—If a wife leaves her husband, and so misconducts herself as to entitle him to a divorce, he can refuse to receive her on her return. Otherwise, he cannot legally refuse to receive her.

MISS BOVINGTON.—In ordinary course the vessel would take no less than six weeks to reach Ceylon, but the voyage may last much longer if there are delays, as often happens.

T. TIME.—You are not entitled to compensation for anything you have planted in the garden, and you have no right to destroy or injure anything planted in it. Should you do so the owner of the property may sue you for damages.

TED B.—We should advise you to have nothing to do with a girl who receives presents from other men, especially from a gentleman so much above her in station. She is not likely to make a good or contented wife.

ANXIOUS AUNT.—If the person is of such infirm mind that he cannot take care of himself, and is dangerous to others, the Guardians may be required to place him either in the imbecile ward or in the asylum; but the father, if able to do so, may be called upon to pay a portion of the cost of his maintenance.

BOB'S WIFE.—1. You may sew and knit and read as much as you like on board ship. Take the necessary materials in the strong linen bag which you keep beside you in your berth. 2. No restriction put upon your keepakes. Take some of all kinds if you like, but it may be necessary to put them in your chest marked "Not wanted on voyage" if they are bulky.

OLD READER.—The earth revolves on its own axis (or axle, if you like to suppose one) to be run from the south pole up through the north, and the globe to turn on that) once in twenty-four hours; that makes day and night. The moon goes round the earth once in twenty-nine days odd hours; that makes the month. Then the earth goes round the sun once in 365 days odd hours, and that makes the year. The sun also rotates on his own axis once in twenty-five days.

SAILOR.—We know of no harmless preparation which will destroy the tattooing.

STROKE.—You will find the names of the churches in the eleventh verse of the first chapter of Revelations.

DEERBROOK.—The simplest device is to use two or three stone bottles filled with hot water.

ROVER.—The most brilliant comet visible in England between 1850 and 1870 was Donati's comet, which was seen at its best in September and October, 1859.

SHOP.—If you sell anything by weight, the weights and scales must be tested and certified by an inspector, or you will be liable to be summoned and fined.

T. D.—Up to the date of Mrs. Pearcey's execution, the last woman who had been hanged in this country was Mrs. Elizabeth Barry. This was at Liverpool, on March 14, 1887.

THEPIS.—1. The publican may be proceeded against for taking pledges without having a pawnbroker's license. 2. Debts for liquor consumed on the premises cannot be recovered.

CLUMSY DICK.—1. You will stand at the lady's left hand, as otherwise you would overshadow both her and the piano. 2. Do not sit, except music is very intricate and you find it necessary to use the piece the lady is playing from.

SIR HUMPHREY.—There is absolutely no inducement whatever to young men to go out to the Australian colonies as rabbit-catchers. Men are not required for that work, and you should not think of going for anything to be got at it.

UNHAPPY JEM.—Hold on. A man does not make a character in four weeks, especially after being very dissipated. The friends who shun you because you are trying to reform are not worth having. You are better without them.

A HUNDRED YEARS FROM NOW.

Where, where will be the birds that sing,

A hundred years to come?

The flowers that now in beauty spring,

A hundred years to come?

The ray like, the lofty brow,

The heart that beats so gaily now,

Oh, where will be love's beaming eyes,

Joy's pleasant smile, and sorrow's sigh,

A hundred years to come?

Who'll press for gold this crowded street,

A hundred years to come?

Who'll tread your church with willing feet,

A hundred years to come?

Pale, trembling age, and fiery youth,

And childhood with its play of truth,

The rich, the poor, on land and sea,

Where will the mighty millions be

A hundred years to come?

We all within our graves shall sleep

A hundred years to come;

No living soul for us will weep

A hundred years to come;

But other men our lands will till,

And others then our streets will fill,

While other birds will sing as gay,

And bright the sunshine as to-day,

A hundred years to come.

GLORIANA.—Gardens, one of the most admired of flowering shrubs, got its name from Alexander Garden, a British physician and naturalist. He corresponded with Linnaeus, and in compliment to him the latter so named it.

S. BOWLIGHT.—It can be computed to within a few thousand miles—which is near enough. The distance varies from 91,000,000 to 95,000,000 miles, being the former when the earth is at its perihelion and the latter when at its aphelion.

CLERE.—By a new military law in France, all clergymen under thirty-five years of age are required to serve in the army. In consequence of this, the Capuchin Fathers are leaving their monasteries in large numbers and emigrating to Canada and the United States.

MURIEL.—You might get a situation as saleswoman in some shop, or as copyist in some office; but if you are as timid and depressed in spirit as you represent yourself to be, you will probably find it difficult to achieve such a thing.

GANE.—Turquoise is the stone for December and signifies "prosperity with Cupid." Garnet is the stone for January and signifies "fidelity." According to the old Roman belief, a turquoise worn by a betrothed lover became lustrous, if either party became unfaithful.

J. SMITH.—You take the thing too literally. You must remember that ghosts and poets fix things to suit the game they are playing. Was the ghost appeared to Hamlet in his mother's boudoir—if mothers had boudoirs in those days—he did not want the queen to see his ghostship, and so, of course, the queen could not see him. She wasn't in the "deal." That is all there was about it.

FRED.—1. Quite legal for you to translate a German book originally published about one hundred years ago if you think the task worth the time you are likely to spend upon it. 2. Write on one side of the paper if you intend to offer the translation to a publisher, who may offer you for it as much or as little as he would require to pay to another for the translation, which may be any sum from £1 to £10.

SUFFERER.—It is a point of the first importance that any weakness, defect or unsteadiness of the eyes should not be neglected, but that the oculist should be at once consulted. Headaches which come on after sewing, reading, watching a play or otherwise using the visual organs in a special direction for a period of time, are usually the direct results of ocular defects.

CONSTANT READER.—Wellington's figure was rather slight, and his height not over five feet nine inches. Napoleon was two inches shorter, and, though thicker set, was by no means muscular. Both kept their faces closely shaven, and were as unlike the stage heroes you mention as men could be. Washington, it is true, was a man of considerable physical strength, but his countenance was the beau ideal of mildness and benevolence.

LADY JANE.—We are quite sure you have not the remotest idea of the duties to be performed, or you would not be so anxious for the situation. But get testimonials from present and past employers, or persons of standing who know you, and for ward copies of these with your application to the "manager" of any of the "lines" advertised in the paper. That is the only course open to you if you have no friends who can personally recommend you.

IGNORANT.—1. All information regarding Civil Service appointments in India is obtainable from the Secretary to Civil Service, Cannon-row, Westminster, S.W. Candidates must study and pass examinations in this country; they cannot go straight to India, and an application addressed to anyone there would be of no avail. 2. Living is cheaper; climate too much for Europeans in summer. 3. Examination of candidates begins on 1st June. They must be between 17 and 18 years. 4. Roughly, 6,000 miles.

HE OR SHE.—Yes, conventionally, there is such a thing as "neuter gender"; that is to say, there are things which have no sex, and which, consequently, are of neuter (no) gender. When you say that "house" is of the neuter gender, you simply say in effect that it has no gender. Such phrases are contrived for our convenience in speech. For example, the greatest astronomer says: "the sun rises," and "the sun sets," although he knows perfectly well that it actually does neither.

GAMSTON.—The Essex referred to was Robert Devereux, the third earl of that name. Soon after the arrival of James I. in London, Essex was made the companion of the Prince of Wales, and shared his studies and amusements. He married, at the age of fifteen, Frances Howard, daughter of the Earl of Suffolk. The marriage ended unhappily, as did his second marriage with Elizabeth, daughter of Sir William Fawkes. He took the side of Parliament against Charles, and at first met with success; but subsequently, mainly on account of his hesitation to fight against the king in person, nearly his whole army fell into the hands of Charles. He died of a fever. It was the Second Earl of Essex who was executed.

POOR BLACK.—We do not think it could be honestly said that the Australian colonies are in any special sense a good field for men in your class. In such places as Melbourne, Sydney, Geelong, and Newcastle a general practice might be gathered, but not with greater ease than in one of our own cities. As for inspection, it is neither prohibited nor required to the same extent as here. There is neither exportation nor importation of live stock there. Our feeling is that if you want out, say, to Melbourne or Sydney, your special training might secure for you a good position on some of the runs. It would be, after all, only as head stockman, or something of that sort. Anything beyond that would depend on your own push or energy.

M. WHITE.—Chilton Hundreds is a district of Buckinghamshire at one time so overrun with robbers that it was found necessary to appoint an official to the oversight of it who had authority to set every such like a little king in his own dominions in dealing with the robbers. Of course the robbers have long been numbered with the past, and the Hundreds are governed by the same laws as other parts of the country now, but the stewardship remains in name with a salary of a few shillings yearly attached to it, so as to make it "an office of profit under the Crown," which compels any M.P. who obtains the appointment to seek re-election at the hands of his constituents. If he fails to do so the attention of the speaker is drawn to the circumstance and a writ is issued for the election of another M.P. in his stead—an elaborate process for enabling M.P.'s to resign.

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